

# THE ARGOSY.

DECEMBER, 1892.

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## A GUILTY SILENCE.

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### CHAPTER XLV

MARGARET AND ESTHER.

THE first month after her return from her wedding-tour was to Margaret Bruhn a time full of anguish and soul-wearing anxiety. She had a double burden to bear. There was, first, the imprisonment of Esther Sarel, and next, the strange disappearance of Trix. Her trouble, as regarded Esther, was a secret one which she was obliged to hide carefully even from those she loved best. Her trouble, as regarded her sister, was one which her husband and father could share with her, and the listless melancholy and sad pre-occupation of manner to which Margaret was a prey at this time, were thus naturally accounted for.

A week after her first visit, Margaret went to Ackworth again, and again she was permitted to see Esther alone. Mr. Davenant accompanied her on this second visit, and condescended to partake of the governor's dry sherry, and to entertain that gentleman with some reminiscences of polite society, during the time his daughter was closeted with the prisoner.

Margaret's second interview with Esther was of a less painful character than her first one. The conditions of the case were known to her. She had tacitly agreed to accept circumstances as they were; to allow Esther to accomplish the sacrifice which she had initiated of her own free will; to enact the unheroic part, and leave to another the buskin in which she herself was afraid to tread. Esther was her scapegoat, who had gone out into the wilderness to perish, while she remained in her tent beneath the palms.

At that second interview, Esther was by much the more cheerful of the two. It was she who consoled and strengthened Margaret, whose humiliation of soul was extreme. Margaret, with her head resting on Esther's shoulder, wept many bitter tears. All Esther's tears seemed to have been shed long ago. There was about her manner now a serenity and elevation which made her seem quite a

different person from the Esther of old times, and lifted her, morally, to a height that made her Margaret's superior. And Margaret felt the superiority, although Esther might not, and knew that the intangible something she had forfeited could never be hers again.

But a fortnight was now wanting to complete the term of Esther's imprisonment. It was arranged that Mrs. Bruhn should meet her outside the prison gates at ten o'clock on the morning of her release. Margaret was already in negotiation with certain friends of hers with the view of obtaining a situation for Esther as soon as she should be at liberty, for Esther would not go back to Helsingham, although Mrs. Bruhn would gladly have taken her into her own house.

"I could not bear it, Miss Margaret," Esther said. "I could not bear to go back to the old place, at least not just yet awhile. It will be far better for me to go among strangers who will never know that I have been in prison. Then again, Mr. Bruhn might not like to have me in his house; and I should be looked down upon by the other servants, and all your kindness could hardly save me from being insulted twenty times a day. No—I will go away, please—a long way off, where I shall never see a face that I have known before."

As Esther wished, so it was arranged, and the situation was ready for her on the day of her release. It was in a quiet country town nearly a hundred miles from Helsingham, and with a family on whose kindness and consideration for those under them Margaret could thoroughly rely.

Margaret longed for the morning of Esther's release even more than Esther herself did. When Esther's imprisonment should have become a thing of the past, Mrs. Bruhn thought that her conscience would probably cease to trouble her so frequently; that as time went on, her feeling of self-abasement would become less acute; that inward peace, and even happiness, might be hers again in years to come. When Esther should be at liberty, the penalty demanded by society would have been paid in full, and in no possible way could her crime be brought home to her. The matter would then rest entirely between herself and Esther, and if Esther were satisfied, who else in all the wide world had any right or reason to complain?

When the wished-for morning arrived, Margaret was driven over to Ackworthing by her father, and reached that town a full hour earlier than was needful. Leaving Mr. Davenant to his own devices, she hired a cab, and waited inside it, close by the prison gates, till the clock struck ten, and Esther Sarel issued forth. Esther's first glance round showed her Mrs. Bruhn beckoning to her from the cab window. Margaret kissed her as tenderly as though Esther had been her own sister when the latter got into the cab.

"Thank Heaven! this day has come at last!" cried Mrs. Bruhn fervently, as she held Esther's hand tight within her own. "Ah!

child, the suffering has not been all on your side. Even cowards have consciences that can sting shrewdly at times."

They drove to an hotel, where Margaret had ordered breakfast in a private room.

"Miss Margaret," said Esther, when the servant had brought in the tray and left the room, "I was your servant once on a time, not very long ago. It will seem to bring back the old days if you will let me wait on you just once again as I used to do."

"You wait on me, Esther! It is I who ought to wait on you. You are my guest this morning—pray understand that. And both now and for ever you are my friend—the one who has done and suffered more for me than all my other friends put together. Sit; and this morning it shall be I who will wait upon you."

Esther's further protests were useless; Margaret would have her own way in the matter; but neither of them had much appetite for breakfast, and the meal was quickly over. When the table was cleared, they drew their chairs close up to the fire, for the weather was bitterly cold, and they had many things to say to each other.

"Esther, did you have any message from, or hear anything of Silas Ringe while you were in prison?" asked Margaret presently, almost in a whisper.

"No, Miss Margaret; he has been as far removed from me as if he were dead," answered Esther, while a slight flush mounted to her face. "Indeed, I have come to regard him in my thoughts as though the silence of the grave were really set between us. Silas chose to leave me, and I could not call him back. But I think there are worse things in life than losing those we love, whether it be by death or desertion. When I saw before me what I thought was my duty, I determined to do it, however hard it might be. If I had let it go by without heeding, and had afterwards married Silas, I could never, never have been happy."

"Would that we could all think as you think, and cling to duty as our greatest earthly good!" cried Margaret in tones of infinite sadness.

"I will confess to you, Miss Margaret, that Silas's desertion of me (though I could not blame him for doing as he did) seemed to me harder to bear than anything else. It seemed to me that if I had only had his love to uphold me, everything else would have been easy to bear. But it was not to be. In prison I had much time for thought, for working these things out in my own mind; and by-and-by, after a long struggle, I began to see more clearly, and to feel and know the blessed truth that all things work together for our good. Then, little by little, a great peace seemed to settle down over my heart, and I could bear to think calmly and lovingly of Silas as of one whom I should never see again in this world, but whom I might hope to see elsewhere, when our hearts shall be purged of all earthly passions, and filled only with that divine and ineffable love, whose source and origin is God."

About two o'clock, according to arrangement, Mr. Davenant arrived at the hotel with the wagonette, and Margaret and Esther were driven by him to the Monkwell station, where Esther's little luggage, which had been sent from Miss Easterbrook's, was awaiting her. The two women walked the little platform arm-in-arm till the arrival of the train. Then Margaret threw up her veil and kissed Esther with tears in her eyes; and Esther, smiling pensively, gently returned the kiss.

"Heaven bless you, and have you ever in its safe keeping, dear Miss Margaret!" she said; and then Mr. Davenant, with kindly officiousness, hustled Esther into the train, and in another minute she was gone.

Mrs. Bruhn went back to Helsingham, sad at heart, but with a burden of care lifted off her mind. She seemed to breathe more freely than she had done from the moment she heard of Esther's imprisonment. Surely now, at last, that wretched business of the stolen letter would be allowed to sleep. It had been expiated in full, and ought now to be buried out of sight for ever. That other great source of trouble arising from the unaccountable disappearance of her sister was still left her, and it was a trouble that made itself felt more poignantly from day to day, as the prospect of Trix's return or recovery seemed to grow more remote. However, as we have already seen, this trouble resolved itself into sunshine a little later on, so that there is no further occasion to speak of it here.

So Margaret strove sedulously to persuade herself that happiness was hers at last.

Taking all things into consideration, there seemed no reason why Mrs. Bruhn should not be happy. Or, if not happy, at least content, which is our nineteenth century version of a word with whose real meaning but few of us are more than vaguely acquainted. But even Content, mild of mien and gentle-eyed though she be, loves best to come unwooded. To those who seek her through her elder sister, Duty, she comes oftenest and stays with them longest: to those who court her for herself alone, she rarely vouchsafes more than a passing smile.

Margaret Bruhn was not even content.

If she had cared less entirely for her husband, if he had been in any way less worthy of her, the secret trouble smouldering low down in her heart would probably have burnt itself out in time, and have left nothing but a pinch of ashes and a faint odour of regrets, like the perfume of withered rose-leaves, behind. But Mr. Bruhn was one of those men whom it is impossible to love half-heartedly. His wife's devotion to him was complete and thorough, and it was the very depth of this devotion that taught her to feel her own unworthiness so keenly. On her conscience there lay a secret which if told him would cause her to forfeit his love for ever; and because of the penalty which the telling of it would entail upon her, her conscience kept urging her more and more, even while she was most jealously



guarding it, to keep it hidden no longer—to cast the poisonous thing from her, and be whole again, however great the cost might be.

But time passed on—weeks and months—and Margaret Bruhn still delayed to do the one thing needful. She declared to herself again and again that she would *not* do it—would not sacrifice her dearest earthly possessions for the sake of an “unknown good.” Silence had been purchased for her at a terrible price. Would it not be the height of absurdity, nay, even the height of madness, to declare that purchase void and of no avail?

All that she had to do was to keep her own counsel, and in time everything would go well with her. As for those troublesome voices, those inward monitors which spoke to her in the still hours of life, she determined to heed them not, but so to fill and occupy her round of days that in the whirring of many diverse wheels, their low grave tones should no longer smite the outward ear, even though some inner sense might tell her that they were still there, and only biding their time to make themselves heard again.

Thus it fell out that Margaret Bruhn was not *quite* happy.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### SILAS RINGE'S RETURN.

EIGHT months had come and gone since the day of Esther Sarel's release from Ackworthing gaol, and another summer had faded into autumn. Mrs. Bruhn had frequent news from Esther, who, judging from her letters, was thoroughly comfortable, and content in the situation which Margaret had found for her. Margaret, not generally the most punctual of correspondents, never failed to answer Esther's letters within a post or two after her receipt of them. On neither side was mention ever made of the secret which drew these two women so closely together; it was never so much as hinted at; neither did the name of Silas Ringe find a place in their correspondence.

Business interests took Mr. Bruhn from Helsingham four or five times a year. Sometimes his visits were to London, sometimes they extended to the Continent, to the manufacturing towns of France and the Low Countries. Towards the end of October he started on one of his more extended journeys, expecting to be nearly a fortnight away. On the third evening after his departure, as Margaret was sitting in the library engaged in making some extracts from a moth-eaten chronicle in which mention was made of Helsingham as early as the eleventh century, one of the servants announced that an old woman was waiting to see her, who refused to mention either her name or her business, but who insisted upon seeing Mrs. Bruhn.

“Show her in,” said Margaret; and presently a very old and

skinny woman was ushered into the library, who made Mrs. Bruhn a respectful curtsy, and then waited to be spoken to.

Margaret's first care was to make the old lady sit down, an object that was not accomplished without some difficulty, the chairs being evidently considered by her as of too ornamental a character to be used after the ordinary fashion of such articles. Then, and not till then, did Margaret inquire the object of her visit.

"I've come, ma'am, from Silas Ringe, who's lying at my house, struck for death."

As soon as Margaret could compose her voice, which was not for several moments, for the very mention of Silas Ringe's name struck a chill to her heart, she said, "And what is it that Mr. Ringe wishes me to do?"

"He wants to see his old sweetheart, Esther Sarel, before he dies. He thought that you might, maybe, know where she is, and would send for her. The wench must be here soon if she's to see Silas alive, for the poor lad's time in this world is short."

"I know where Esther Sarel is living, and will telegraph for her without delay; but she can hardly reach Helsingham before ten or eleven to-morrow morning."

"It will be a miracle, ma'am, if poor Silas lasts out till that time."

"I will write out a message at once," said Mrs. Bruhn, "and will send it down to the station by a mounted messenger. How long has Silas Ringe been at your house?"

"Three weeks come to-morrow. He looked very worn and ill when he came, and next day he was struck down with the fever that has been so bad all the summer at our end of the town; and now the doctors say, that though the fever's left him, he's sunk so low that they can't bring him round."

"Poor, poor fellow! How I wish that you had come to me when he was first taken ill."

"Eh, but, ma'am, how was I to know? I suppose he come to my house because his mother and me had been old friends, and I'm sure he was as welcome as the day to the spare shakedown in the little top room. But he never spoke about wanting to see anybody, being proud and sullen like, even when his fever was at the height, and it wasn't till he thought the doctors had given him up that he axed me to come to you and inquire about Esther."

Mrs. Bruhn left the room to despatch the message which she had been hastily writing while the old woman was talking to her.

"I will go back with you to your house," she said on her return. "In case Esther Sarel should not arrive in time to see him alive, it will comfort her to know that I was with him during his last moments."

"Law! ma'am, my house is not the sort of place for the likes of you," exclaimed the old crone; "besides, they do say the fever's catching, but it hasn't took me yet, thank goodness! though I've waited on the poor lad night and day since he were took bad."

"I *must* go with you," said Margaret. "I should never forgive myself afterwards, were I to neglect doing so. As far as money can repay you for what you have done to Silas Ringe, you shall be amply compensated. You must allow me ten minutes for changing my dress; meanwhile, I hope you will have something to eat and drink."

A cab took Mrs. Bruhn and the old woman to a corner of the street in which the latter lived. On the way, Margaret satisfied herself that nothing had been wanting in the case of Silas on the score of good medical advice. The old woman, whose name proved to be Mrs. Dearlove—which she pronounced as though it were a word of two unconnected syllables—gave her the names of the two doctors who had attended Silas, both of whom Margaret knew to be experienced men.

The neighbourhood in which Mrs. Dearlove lived was a very low and wretched one, so low and wretched, in fact, that Mrs. Bruhn was quite unaware that anything like it existed in Helsingham. Had she seen it by daylight, it would have seemed still worse, but some of its most repulsive features were hidden by the darkness, only faintly broken here and there by a sickly lamp.

Silas was lying on a truckle-bed in a top room of the little low-roofed house. With many aspects of illness Margaret was by no means unfamiliar; but she thought, as she entered the room where the young carpenter lay, that she had never seen any one who presented an appearance so utterly deathlike while still among the living. He seemed literally to be nothing but skin and bone; only, the skin was yellow parchment. He was too weak to lift a hand, or even to move his head without assistance; and he lay on his back, as immovable, except for the slow, laboured heavings of his chest, as one stretched for the grave. But his wide-open eyes looked bigger than ever they had done before, and shone with a light that seemed to have been kindled beyond the stars. He rolled them unceasingly from side to side of the little room, but apparently without any recognition of the actual objects before him, seeing some inner vision, it may be, but whether of the past or the future no mortal save himself would ever know.

Margaret's heart seemed to weep tears of blood as she gazed on the wreck before her. For the first time, she seemed to comprehend at a glance the whole series of events resulting from her one crime, as they followed each other in accordance with that sequential law which governs all our actions, good and bad, oftentimes making the event of to-day the result of something which happened yesterday, or a year ago, although we ourselves may be too purblind to distinguish the fine thread that knots up one with the other.

"Silas, honey!" said Mrs. Dearlove, bending over the sick man; "Silas, honey! here's a lady come to see thee."

But Silas took not the slightest notice. The big luminous eyes

still rolled steadily from side to side, as though they were watching the vibrations of some gigantic pendulum, visible to them alone.

"Poor darling! he don't hear me," said the old woman to Mrs. Bruhn. Then, in a louder voice, she addressed the sick man in the same terms as before. This time the familiar voice seemed to pierce his clouded senses, bringing him back from the very edge of the grave. It was strange, and at the same time inexpressibly touching, to watch the unsteady eyes steady themselves flickeringly; to mark the slow dawn of recognition creep painfully over the pallid face, till at length, as if an unseen angel had touched the sick man's eyes with his torch, there leapt into them a sudden flash, and Earth claimed him as her own again, to have and to hold for a little time longer.

"Where's Esther? I want Esther!" he said in a low clear whisper; and his burning eyes devoured the faces of Margaret and the old woman.

"She's been sent for, honey, by this kind lady. She's not living in the town now, but she's been sent for, and she'll be here in the morning."

"She must come soon," whispered the sick man, "or she will not find me here. Just now I fancied that she and I were out walking together in the fields, as we used to do on Sunday evenings in summer. I felt her hand on my arm as plain as ever I felt anything in my life; and there was a sprig of old-man in my button-hole; I seem to smell it now."

He had not appeared to notice Margaret before, but now his eyes wandered to her face, and rested there inquiringly. "This is the lady, Silas, that Esther used to live with. She would come to see thee, and it's she that's sent for Esther."

"Miss Davenant?" murmured Silas interrogatively.

"Yes, I am Miss Davenant," said Margaret, seating herself on a low stool by the edge of the bed. "You must forgive my intruding on you, but when I heard how ill you were, I could not help coming to see for myself whether I could not be of service to you in some way, and also to assure you that Esther has been telegraphed for, and will doubtless be here early in the morning."

"Ah, my Esther used always to be fond of you," said Silas, as though communing more with his own thoughts than attending to what Margaret had said. "I remember. Yes. Nothing is forgotten—nothing." He lapsed into silence, and his eyes began to wander a little, as though he heard dream-voices calling him back to the land of shadows and forgetfulness.

"How I wish I could do something for you," said Margaret. "Were it only till Esther shall arrive, and be able to take my place near you." There was a tone of unmistakable sympathy in her soft, clear voice. Silas's eyes steadied themselves again, and he came back to earthly things with a little sigh.

"Yes, my Esther was very fond of you," he murmured again. "Last time I saw her, she was in prison, poor child! and I left her in her trouble, like the mean coward that I was. I acted like a cur—a cur; I, who used to fancy that I had the makings of a gentleman in me. A wretched, low-bred cur!"

Here there came a slight interruption. A fresh bottle of medicine was brought by the doctor's boy, which Mrs. Dearlove at once opened and tasted approvingly. "Take a drop of it at once, honey," she said. "It's grand stuff."

So Silas took a draught, and it revived him wonderfully.

"Just you give me a good shake, if you please, ma'am, if I happen to be asleep as you go out," said the old woman in a low voice to Mrs. Bruhn; and then she went downstairs to snatch a little sleep by the fire.

"That was a strange, strange story that Esther told me in prison," began Silas, as if merely following out the current of his own thoughts; "and one that I have never been able to understand. Guilty, and yet not guilty. How is it possible to reconcile such a contradiction?" He paused; then, looking up suddenly at Margaret, he said: "Can you reconcile it for me, Miss Davenant?"

Margaret's pale face grew paler, and her soul seemed to shrink within her like a hunted criminal on whom the finger of Justice is about to be laid; but she answered not a word.

"Do *you* believe her guilty, Miss Davenant? Do you believe that she stole the letter?"

"I do not. I firmly believe her to have been innocent."

"That is what she herself said. She said, 'I am innocent; but the world must believe me guilty.' If she was innocent, why was she afraid to say so? Why did she allow herself to be put in prison for a crime that she had never committed, without making at least some effort to clear herself? It's all a weary puzzle to me."

He sighed heavily, and closed his eyes, as though he would fain shut out the world and its troubles for ever. What could Margaret say? How could she pour balm over the bruised heart of the dying man? She could not give him back the life, and love, and happiness that might have been his had that fatal letter never been touched. All that she could do was to brighten, in some measure, his last few moments on earth; and how little that was to do, in comparison with the evil that had wrought itself out, from a single wrong action, in consequences that would not merely influence the whole of her own life, but had already recoiled with such terrible force on the heads of at least two innocent persons!

But even the little that it lay in her power to do to sweeten the last hours of poor Silas, could only be accomplished by the sacrifice of that secret which both she and Esther had striven with such bitter pains to keep a secret for ever. That it must be sacrificed, she at once decided. Enough pain and misery had been incurred on her

account; and, although she was powerless to alter the past, there was one sure mode of preventing the gangrene from spreading further. She must tell the truth. And during those minutes, while Margaret Bruhn sat by the bed of the sinking man, almost in the very presence of the Angel of Death, a consciousness came over her that it would be better for her to lose the love and esteem of all who were dear to her, better to lose husband and home, than let her life remain any longer an acted lie—a fair surface, hiding that below which must in time poison the whole system beyond any possible cure. This was the consciousness that came over her, or rather, the revelation that was granted her—a revelation of the higher life, to attain to which she must leave the green slothful valley in which she had been sojourning, and pass with bare feet over the burning ploughshares, and into the desert beyond, where no green thing is, but where at times come faint whispers of encouragement, and sweet cooling winds that fill the soul with divine rapture, so that the heavenly gates seem nearer than of old, and the hills on which God sits for ever.

"Silas!" said Margaret, kneeling by the side of the bed, and pressing one of the sick man's wasted hands in both hers—"Silas! I believe Esther to have been entirely innocent of stealing the letter. I know her to have been so!"

Silas's fingers clutched those of Margaret convulsively. "It is you who tell me this, you who knew her so well?" he cried. "Oh! there must be some truth in it, there must be! You would not dare to deceive a dying man. But why is not Esther here? Why does she not come and tell me all about it? I want to hear my darling tell me with her own lips that she did not take the letter."

"A few hours will bring her to your side, and then she shall tell you, as I tell you now, that she was as innocent as you are of what was laid to her charge."

"But why could she not say so on her trial? I read the account of it in the papers; and it said there that she pleaded guilty. There's some mystery in it all that's past my power of finding out?"

"Esther sacrificed herself in order to save some one else," said Margaret in a voice that was hardly raised above a whisper.

"You know that? You are telling me the truth?" cried Silas eagerly; and as if Margaret's words had lent him new energy, he raised himself on one elbow, and stared into her white face with eager burning eyes.

"What I am telling you is the solemn truth," said Margaret. "Take comfort from my words, and——"

"Too late! too late!" said Silas mournfully. "If I had but known this at the time, I should not have left her as I did. If she had but trusted me! But she did not, and my wretched pride made me desert her; and now I am here, and your words have come too late."

Margaret had slipped down by the side of the bed, and buried her



face in her hands. "I am a murderess," she kept repeating to herself, and those few words told the whole burden of her thoughts. The pathos of Silas's "too late" pierced her dark mood, and she burst into tears. Her sobs broke the reverie into which Silas had fallen during the last few moments. He looked at her curiously.

"Since the strange fact you have just told me is so well known to you," he said, "you are no doubt acquainted with the name of the person for whose sake my Esther was allowed to sacrifice herself and me?"

"I am," moaned Margaret through her tears.

"Tell me the name of that person," said Silas.

"Margaret Davenant!"

The words seemed to be torn from her by main force, and as she spoke them she flung up her clenched hands, and seemed to call Heaven to witness that her wretched secret was a secret no longer.

The temporary strength lent him by his medicine, and by the excitement of talking with Margaret, was fast deserting Silas, and he sank back on his pillow with a low groan of mingled pain and weakness. For a little while he lay utterly silent, and with closed eyes, except for his laboured breathing, like one already dead. Presently his eyes opened, and in them was a fierce baleful light, like that which shone in them when he spurned Esther from him in the prison as a guilty creature on whom he would never look more. By an almost superhuman effort he raised himself in bed, and stretching over, laid a bony hand on Margaret's shoulder. "Wretched woman!" he began in a voice that was as loud, clear, and distinct as if he had been in full health, "it was for your sake, then, to save you from detection, that the happiness of two people was ruthlessly destroyed; that one of them was branded as a thief before the world, and the other rendered so miserable that death seemed better to him than life! You, the superfine lady, were the real thief, and that poor girl was merely your scapegoat! You could let her be taken up, and put into prison, and suffer the punishment that you ought to have suffered, and all without so much as lifting a finger to try to save her! You had the heart and the conscience to allow this!"

"Hear me for one moment," pleaded Margaret through her tears. "I was away, out of England, at the time the discovery was made. That Esther took the blame and the punishment on herself in order to save me, is quite true, but it was done without my knowledge or sanction. I say this not to lessen in the slightest degree the nobility of Esther's action, but to prove to you that I am not so deeply to blame as may at first sight appear. I knew nothing of what Esther had done for me, I did not even know that the letter had been discovered, till after my return to England, which was not till Esther's imprisonment was within a fortnight of being over."

"Woman!" cried Silas sternly—and his long, lean fingers gripped her by the shoulder till she could not repress a low cry of agony—

"woman! do you know what it was your duty to have done—your bare duty, and nothing more? Yes, you know it just as well as I can tell you. You know that the first hour of your knowledge ought to have been the last of Esther's imprisonment. But how much longer is this lie to be believed by the world? How much longer is my poor girl to be held as a thief, and compelled to find a home far away from all who know her? How much longer, I ask, shall this foul wrong remain unrighted?"

"No longer—no longer!" cried Margaret. "This very night it shall be told—to those whose love and esteem I value beyond aught else on earth."

"How am I to know that you are not lying to me? Swear, by all that you hold most holy, that you will not let another sun rise till you have told the whole truth about this cursed matter!"

"I swear it, by all that I hold most holy!" said Margaret solemnly.

"I shall die, but my Esther will live. Her character will be cleared, and will shine out brighter than before. But all this comes too late to give me back the happiness and love that ought to have been mine—too late to mend my broken life!"

These last words died away in a whisper that was almost inaudible. He sank back on his pillow; an expression of awe ineffable crept like a shadowy veil over his features; his eyes filmed; he murmured something faintly; a light foam gathered on his lips; a shiver passed through him twice from head to foot; and Silas Ringe was no longer among the living.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

### THE REEL WOUND UP.

"GONE is he, poor dear?" said Mrs. Dearlove coolly, as she hobbled upstairs in answer to Margaret's cry. "The doctor's last words to me were, that he might go off any minute. No use fetching anybody at this time of the night. All the doctors in the three kingdoms couldn't bring him back to us for five seconds. He'll make a lovely corpse, poor lad!"

As soon as Margaret could get out of the house of death, she hurried home as though wings had been added to her feet. By this time it was close upon midnight, and the little town was abed. She scarcely met a soul all the way as she went. The servant, an old family one, who let her in stared at her, and ventured to ask if she were well.

"No, she was not ill, only tired," she said; and she ordered a light to be taken into the library, and gave orders that no one need sit up any longer. Having bathed her hands and face, she sat down to write. She would not trust herself to reflect upon the promise she

had made to Silas Ringe; she would act upon it without a moment's delay. Her first letter was addressed to Sir Richard Ashburnham, the magistrate before whom Esther Sarel had been first examined, and by whom she had been committed for trial. Resting her head in her hands for a little while, till she had succeeded in collecting her thoughts sufficiently to enable her to put into quiet, commonplace language what she had to say, she at length dipped her pen in the inkstand, and wrote as under:—

“DEAR SIR RICHARD,—It may probably be within your recollection that about eleven months ago a girl, Esther Sarel by name, who had acted in the capacity of my maid during the time I was at Irongate House, was brought before you charged with having stolen a certain letter from the Helsingham post-office. The letter in question had been sent from Australia, and was addressed to Mr. Hugh Randolph, a surgeon of this town, who since that time has become my brother-in-law. The letter was found hidden away in an ebony casket belonging to me, which had been stolen some time previously from Irongate House; and it—the casket—was afterwards found in some fields outside the town with the letter still intact in a secret drawer. Both Esther and I had been in the post-office (in the sorting-room) the same evening that the letter was missed, and it seemed certain that either she or I must have taken it. When Mr. Dawkins came to inquire into the affair, he was induced, from Esther's manner, to set her down as the guilty person. He accused her of having stolen the letter, and she at once confessed that she had done so. With the result you are acquainted. Esther was brought before you next day, and committed for trial, and when that event came off, she was sentenced to four months' imprisonment.

“Both before you, and before the judge who tried her, Esther Sarel confessed to having stolen the letter. And yet that confession was wholly untrue. She did not steal the letter; she did not even know of its having been stolen till accused by Mr. Dawkins. I, and I alone, was the thief.

“Into the motives by which I was actuated when I took the letter it is not needful that I should enter here. I may, however, state that it was not taken with the expectation of finding money in it (I have not sunk quite so low as that), but merely to keep back for a short time from the person to whom it was addressed a certain piece of information with which I had accidentally become acquainted.

“The letter was found, and the arrest of Esther Sarel took place, the day after I left England on my wedding tour. Not the slightest intimation of the affair reached my ears till my return, more than three months later, by which time Esther Sarel's imprisonment was within a fortnight of its expiration. I at once sought an interview with her in prison, and I then ascertained, for the first time, by what motives she had been influenced in taking on herself the guilt of a

transaction of which she was entirely innocent. She had done it to save me—done it out of gratitude for a few acts of simple kindness shown towards her mother when she lay ill, and towards a youthful brother and sister after the mother's death. Does this seem incredible to you?—Read and believe. I write nothing but the simple truth. The antique virtues are not extinct; they can flourish even in the bosom of a servant-girl.

"The result of my interview with Esther was simply this: that Esther remained in prison to work out the term of her sentence, while I went back home, and spoke no word to any one of the secret that lay so heavily on my life.

"That it should remain a secret was agreed between Esther and myself. She was noble enough to entreat that it should be so, and I was coward enough to accept her offer. In viewing my own conduct in this matter I am not troubled with any obliquity of vision; it shows quite as black in my eyes as it can possibly do in yours, or in those of any other person. Neither could your reproaches—if to reproach were your province—add aught of bitterness to those waters of Marah of which my soul has drunk of late till it is nigh sick unto death.

"When Esther Sarel came out of prison, I had a situation ready for her in a town a hundred miles from Helsingham, and there she has remained since that time. I had determined in my own mind that my secret should remain a secret for ever, that not even my husband should become aware of the crime of which his wife had been guilty. It is not necessary to recapitulate here the circumstances that have induced me to alter that decision. That I *have* decided to alter it, my present communication to you is sufficient proof. To you, as the magistrate by whom Esther Sarel was committed, I send this simple statement of facts, leaving you to deal with it in whatever way you may deem most advisable. My wish is that Esther Sarel should be exculpated in the eyes of all who knew her from any participation in a crime for which she has been unjustly punished.

"I shall send a copy of this statement to my husband, who is at present from home. I dread the shock to him ten thousand times more than I fear anything that can happen to myself.

"MARGARET BRUHN."

Without pausing to think, or to read over what she had written, when Margaret had completed her letter to Sir Richard Ashburnham, she at once penned the following note to her husband:—

"MY DEAREST ROBERT,—Accompanying these lines you will receive a copy of a statement, the original of which I shall send by the next post to Sir Richard Ashburnham. That its contents will prove a terrible shock to you, I cannot doubt. The nature of the immediate circumstances which induces me to keep no longer as a secret

that which I have carefully hidden for so long a time, I will reveal to you when I see you next. I cannot write respecting them. That you will ever again look upon me as your wife, after you shall have read my confession, is more than I dare hope for. I do not even ask you to forgive me—at least, not now. There are some wrongs too monstrous for immediate forgiveness, and the wrong I have done you is one of them. Darling! I have loved you very, very dearly; and the very depth of that love increases my humiliation ten thousand fold. Do with me as you will. Imprison me; cast me out of house and home; refuse to look on me ever again; and I will not murmur. My greatest punishment will lie in the thought that I have deceived you, who loved me and trusted me so implicitly—in the recollection that I willingly allowed you to wed a thief.

“Give me credit, however, for this much: that had there seemed to me at the time I married you the remotest probability of this thing ever rising up in judgment against me, I would rather have been struck dead at your feet than have become your wife. I had good reason for believing that it was buried out of sight for ever, and that my secret would die with me, unsuspected by every one. What my motives were for taking the letter, and how the act has at length been brought home to me, are points on which I cannot enter now. If you do not choose to hear them from my lips, I will put them down in writing for you whenever you may wish me to do so. You will no doubt be able to judge better than I as to what the action of Sir Richard Ashburnham will probably be on receipt of my communication. Inspired by that fortitude which despair alone can lend the soul, I await here whatever may happen next. Come what may, I shall never, never cease to love you. Dearest! is it not written that in expiation there lies a virtue sufficient to wash away the stains of even greater crimes than mine? If this be so, should we meet no more on earth, it may, perhaps, be granted to me to meet you again in that Hereafter to which the happy and the unhappy are alike hastening. That hope is all that is now left to console

“Your wretched

“MARGARET.”

With this letter to her husband Mrs. Bruhn inclosed a copy of the one intended for Sir Richard Ashburnham. When both were ready, she put on a bonnet and shawl, and slipped out of the quiet house, in which no one was up but herself, and hurried through the deserted streets, stopping for a moment now and then to gather breath, till she reached the post-office. She dropped her letters into the box with a sort of slow reluctance; but when they were in and past her recovery, she seemed to breathe more freely, as a wretch on whom sentence has been delayed might do when he hears his doom and there is no longer room for suspense.

A light shone through the blinds of the familiar post-office window.

The sight of it brought vividly back to Margaret's mind every minute event of that fatal evening, and as she went back homeward she re-enacted the whole hateful drama in her own mind, with all its phases of shame and misery, as though she were rehearsing some half-forgotten part, which she might be called upon to go through again at a moment's notice.

She felt fevered and ill when she got home, and unutterably weary. Instead of going to bed, she lay down on the sofa in her dressing-room, and there passed the remainder of the night. In the morning she was worse, and her illness grew upon her as the day advanced. "Perhaps I shall die," she said to herself more than once. "It will be better for Robert—better for every one that I should die. We always think tenderly of our dead, and they would think tenderly of me when I should be no more."

Margaret's letter reached her husband in Paris. She had only written the truth when she stated that its contents would prove a great shock to him. He hurried home with the least possible delay, but Mrs. Bruhn was past recognizing him by the time he reached Brook Lodge. She had been struck down by the same fever that had claimed Silas as a victim. She had brought the contagion from his death-bed.

Mr. Bruhn found a message awaiting him from Sir Richard Ashburnham, who had been one of his most intimate friends for many years, and as soon as he had seen everything done for his wife that could be done, he drove over to see him. Mrs. Bruhn's strange communication was fully discussed between them, the decision at which they arrived being, that so long as Mrs. Bruhn should remain in the condition in which she then was, her confession should be kept strictly private, and no proceedings of any kind be taken in the matter.

Mr. Bruhn sent for Esther Sarel immediately after his return from Sir Richard's. Esther was in Helsingham, having gone thither in compliance with the telegram sent her by Mrs. Bruhn on the night of Silas's death. She had stayed to see her lover buried, and was just on the point of going back to her situation when Mr. Bruhn's summons reached her. She had wondered that no message from Margaret had been received by her during the four or five days of her stay in Helsingham, especially after she had learned from Mrs. Dearlove that Mrs. Bruhn had been with Silas at the moment of his death; but having come to the conclusion that Margaret must have some secret reasons for not communicating with her, she was about to take her leave of the little town without venturing near Brook Lodge, when she received the message desiring her to go up there at once.

Her interview with Mr. Bruhn was a painful one for both of them. Esther was not slow to understand the kind of person with whom she had to deal, and quickly saw that any reservations or



concealments which she might feel inclined to make as in the interest of Margaret would be worse than useless. Consequently, she made a full and frank statement of all the circumstances so far as they were known to her.

Her distress was extreme when told by Mr. Bruhn of the confession which his wife had made a few days previously. She cried bitterly for a long time, and implored Mr. Bruhn to keep the confession as a secret confided to him alone, and that even at the eleventh hour all might yet be well. Mr. Bruhn could promise nothing. He could only await the recovery of his wife with what patience was possible to him, till which time no further step of any kind could be taken in the matter. He was appalled at the abyss that had opened so suddenly at his feet, and stood as one amazed, not knowing which way to turn.

The crisis of Margaret's illness came and went, and the doctors decided that she would recover. And recover she did, in body but not in mind. Her wits were gone: she was melancholy mad. She knew neither husband, nor sister, nor father. Esther alone she recognized; and as Esther's presence seemed to soothe the darker fits of her malady and to act more beneficially upon her than that of any stranger could have done, Esther prayed to be allowed to accompany her when it was found necessary to remove her to a private asylum; and so went with her, and waited upon her with a loving patience that seemed never to grow weary.

One peculiarity of Mrs. Bruhn's malady was that she was continually striving to hide away a letter that she fancied she had stolen. In order to humour her she was supplied with a fictitious letter, which, with a great show of mystery, she hid every morning in a fresh place, her only anxiety, so far as those about her could judge, being lest any one, by design or accident, should discover the spot where she had so carefully put it away. She had other strange fancies. "I know quite well what place this is," she would often say to Esther. "It is a private madhouse, and I am shut up here in order that my vast property may be enjoyed by some one else. They will never let me out alive, I am quite aware of that. But the world shall learn my sad history from my memoirs. They will form a most remarkable book. I shall begin them next week without fail, and don't forget, Esther, to have a fine quill ready for me on Monday morning. One's memoirs ought always to be written with a quill."

Despite this sad aberration of mind, the physician under whose care Mrs. Bruhn was placed did not fail to cheer her husband with hopes of her ultimate recovery.

These hopes were happily verified. By degrees her reason came back to her, and at the end of two years she quitted the asylum thoroughly and permanently cured.

Her return to sanity was a process full of anguish and humiliation of soul. When she called to mind, one by one, the events that had

happened to her up to the time that she was taken ill; when she knelt again in memory by the death-bed of Silas Ringe, and penned once more in thought her letter to Sir Richard Ashburnham, and that other letter to her husband, she was almost ready to wish that in this world her senses had never been restored to her.

What had been the effect of her confession upon her husband? That at once became the great question with her as soon as she fully understood where she was and the chain of events that had conducted her thither. Did he still look upon her as his wife? Had he ever been to see her during her long confinement? Or had he cast her off from the first, utterly and for ever?

These were but a few of the self-torturing questions put by her to Esther Sarel.

Esther's assurances that Mr. Bruhn still regarded her as his wife, that he was in no way changed, unless it were by his deep anxiety for her recovery, fell like sweetest balm over Margaret's troubled spirit, soothing her reason, which seemed still to flutter and tremble in the balance, with hopes of a happiness that seemed to her far greater than her deserts. Still, it was not without much inward fear and trembling that she awaited her first interview with her husband after the power of recognition had been given back to her.

But when they did meet, she was not left long in doubt. Mr. Bruhn's joy at finding that his wife was really about to be restored to him was too genuine to admit of the slightest question on her part.

"And can you really and truly forgive me, and look upon me with the same loving eyes as of old?" asked Margaret when she had recounted to her husband the whole story of her one crime, and how she had promised Silas Ringe on his deathbed that it should remain a secret no longer.

"Let him that is without sin cast the first stone," answered Mr. Bruhn. "Yes, Margaret, as I stand in need of forgiveness myself, so can I freely and fully forgive you. You erred; and bitterly have you paid for your error. With Esther Sarel, to whom we both owe so much, it now rests to decide in what form and to what extent her dying lover's wish that her innocence should be declared before the world shall be carried out. If Esther says that it must be carried out to the extreme letter, we can only bow our heads and accept the consequences."

"That was certainly the spirit in which Silas Ringe intended that his wishes should be carried out."

"Probably so," answered Mr. Bruhn. "But, for all that, the question must now be decided by Esther. Her noble heart will teach her to decide upon that which is best for all of us to do—even that which Silas himself would most approve, now that his soul is purged from earthly passions, could his voice but reach us from the other side of the grave."

Esther was summoned, and now first learnt what had passed between Mrs. Bruhn and Silas on the night of the latter's death.

What she was told distressed her greatly. But when Mr. Bruhn informed her that his wife, in her determination to carry out the promise she had made the dying man, had sent, not merely to her husband, but also to Sir Richard Ashburnham, a confession that it was she alone who stole the letter, and that it now rested with her, Esther, as the one who had suffered most for that other person's fault, to decide in what form and within what limits the said confession of guilt should be made public—Esther at once vehemently protested against any further steps being taken in the matter. She maintained that in what Mrs. Bruhn had already done she had carried out the wish of Silas as far as there was the slightest necessity for her to do so. The secret was a secret no longer, and therein the behests of Silas had been obeyed; further than that it would be madness to go. The crime had already been expiated in full. Let that expiation suffice, and seek not to reopen an old wound on which Time's healing touch was already laid. Esther finished by saying that if Mrs. Bruhn should still persist in declaring her guilt to the world, she, Esther, would combat the assertion as the hallucination of a mad woman.

Mr. Bruhn was unutterably relieved to find that Esther's decision coincided so closely with his own secret hopes; but Margaret's conscience was only half satisfied: between what she had done and what she had promised Silas that she would do, the gap was so wide! After several conversations with her husband and Esther, at intervals and when her mind was clear enough to grasp the whole question, the decision ultimately arrived at was this:—that Mrs. Bruhn should reveal the real facts of the case to Dr. Randolph and his wife, to her father, to Mrs. Sutton, to Miss Easterbrook, and to Miss Ivimey, as people to all of whom Esther was well known, and whose good opinion must be precious to her; but that beyond this limited circle not even a whisper of suspicion should be breathed against Mrs. Bruhn. It was not without great difficulty that Esther was induced to agree to even this concession, but Margaret was so firm in the matter that she was at length compelled to give way.

This confession was not made till some weeks subsequent to Margaret's first interview with her husband after her reason had come back to her, for it was not till nearly two months later that her physician pronounced her thoroughly cured, and sanctioned her return home. It is hardly needful to say that Esther Sarel accompanied her. Next day she summoned all those whose names are given above, and then and there she told her story.

No persuasion would have been sufficient to induce Esther to stay at Brook Lodge that afternoon. She crept away to Mrs. Dearlove's, and there she remained till a late hour listening to all that the garrulous old woman had to tell her respecting poor, dead Silas. She

had heard it more than once before ; but each time the story of his illness and death was told her, it struck her with a sort of sad freshness, and seemed to lose none of its interest by repetition. A neat monument, at Mr. Bruhn's expense, had been erected over the grave of Silas, and Mrs. Bruhn's first visit after her return home was—in the company of Esther—to the cemetery in which the young carpenter slept his last sleep.

It may be added here that the sideboard carved by Silas Ringe was duly exhibited in London, where it did not fail to attract considerable attention. When the Exhibition was over, it was fixed in its position in the dining-room at White Towers, where it may still be seen together with many other curiosities, ancient and modern. The price, as agreed upon with Lord Borrowash, was paid over after the death of Silas to the young carpenter's next of kin.

Of late, the routine of business had grown irksome to Mr. Bruhn, and he was glad, for the satisfaction of his own conscience, to seize on so sufficient an excuse as the state of his wife's health to break through the trammels that had held him for so many years, and which but a little while ago he would not have believed it possible that he could ever wish to escape from. At the end of three months from the date of Mrs. Bruhn's return home, he had completed the requisite arrangements for the transfer of his business ; and leaving the final settlements in the care of his solicitors, he bid farewell to the little town, and, accompanied by his wife and Esther Sarel, he set out for a lengthened tour abroad.

The last news received at Helsingham states that Mr. and Mrs. Bruhn were on their way back from Jerusalem. They will probably return to England after a time, in which case it is not unlikely that Mr. Bruhn will enter the exciting arena of political life, and Margaret's long-standing ambition to see her husband in Parliament may, perhaps, be gratified.

Esther Sarel is still with them, and will stay with them through life. She is not looked upon in any way as a dependant. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Bruhn would for one moment agree to regard her in that light. She is their very devoted, humble friend. She is regarded everywhere as one of the family, and she has risen with the occasion. Her powers of adaptability are considerable, and as she reads a great deal, and is constantly mixing with educated people, she has come at length to look like "one to the manner born ;" and in that pale, quiet woman—quiet in manner and quiet in dress,—the chief characteristic of whose face is its *goodness* ; who does not talk much, but whose opinions, when asked for, are all instinct with plain, good sense,—few would suspect that they were looking on one who but a few short years ago was nothing more than a waiting-maid in a ladies' school. Esther will never marry. Her love for Silas Ringe was the one passion of her life. She is one of those rare women who love solitude for its own sake, and seek it out ; and as Esther has that fine tact

which comes to some people as a gift of nature, she never seems *de trop*, and is especially careful that neither Mr. Bruhn nor Margaret shall have occasion to think her company a bore.

Of Margaret herself what shall be said in conclusion? Merely this:—that she is brighter and happier, healthier in mind and body, than she has been for many years. It is the quiet, toned-down happiness of an autumnal day. The garishness of summer has fled like a dream; in the atmosphere there is a faint, impalpable melancholy, a subtle odour of sadness, that pervades the whole landscape, and is yet almost as delicious as the first fresh breath of spring, while about it there is a mellow sweetness such as never fans the hoyden cheek of May.

Mrs. Cardale is still as much an invalid as when introduced to the reader's notice. She and Margaret are great friends, and pass much of their time in each other's society. She can never be sufficiently grateful to Margaret for having weaned her brother from "that detestable mill," although Margaret, in reality, had nothing whatever to do in the matter.

Our darling Trix has a little family growing up around her, and is as happy a young matron as you would find in a day's search. Mrs. Chillinghurst, of Pingley Dene, did not forget the request of her particular friend, Mrs. Cardale. She took Trix by the hand, and introduced her to some of the best families in the county, and included her frequently in invitations to the Dene parties. On several occasions when she drove into Helsingham she stopped to take luncheon with the doctor's pretty wife. These were certain proofs that the great county lady was thoroughly satisfied with her *protégée*, and the best circles of Helsingham were not slow to follow the lead thus given them. Trix is fond of society, and she went out a great deal during the first three years of her married life. Of late, however, maternal duties have claimed more of her time and thoughts, but there is no reason to suppose that life is less pleasant to her on that account. She never looks happier than when romping with her youngsters in the nursery, in which noisy apartment Mrs. Sutton spends more hours than it would be convenient to count. The old lady is still as dictatorial and self-opinionated as ever; but she seems to be universally beloved by the little people, whom she alternately scolds and coddles after a fashion that Dr. Hugh would not allow from any other than herself.

But the Doctor's practice has extended so much of late that he has scant time for thoughts unconnected with his profession. He is probably the hardest-worked man in Helsingham; and although he sometimes grumbles that his patients are slowly killing him instead of the reverse, his measure of content would be less deep were his days less busily occupied. People say that he must be making his fortune, but that is as it may be. It may interest some fair reader to know that his wife has, for her own particular use, as neat a little brougham as even the Ladies' Mile could show.

Mr. Davenant has resided with Dr. Hugh since the breaking-up of the establishment at Brook Lodge. Increasing age has not failed to bring with it some touch of infirmity; but if slightly more shaky on his legs than he used to be, he is still as carefully got up as ever, and by gaslight looks at least fifteen years younger than he really is.

Between Miss Easterbrook and Mr. Davenant there is a mild flirtation of long standing; but that it will ever end in matrimony, neither of the parties chiefly concerned, nor any one who is aware of its existence, ever believes for a moment. Still, the flirtation—a tea-and-toast one from the first—goes on, and will probably last as long as the ancient Adonis himself. Mr. Davenant is just the kind of man who, if he were on his deathbed, and a lady called to see him, would think more of paying her a compliment than of the serious subjects that ought to engage his thoughts at such a time.

The prestige of the worthy mistress of Irongate House has in no wise decreased. Her establishment is always full, and, really, Miss Easterbrook must have a very nice little balance at her banker's. Every spring she makes a point of telling her friends that she intends to retire into private life before the close of the year. But one year comes to an end after another, and still finds her nestled among her fledgelings, under the old roof of Irongate House, and there, without doubt, she will remain while she lives.

In a retired corner of the country churchyard where lie the remains of her father and mother, Charlotte Herne sleeps her last sleep. The unquiet heart is at rest now. The fluttering prisoner that beat its wings so vainly against the cage in which cruel circumstance had confined it, pants for liberty no longer; through that golden portal which we call death, liberty has come to her as it must come to each of us in turn. Whatever her errors may have been, we would fain hope that with that liberty poor Charlotte has also found pardon and peace—"the peace that passeth all understanding."

And so, dear reader—Farewell.

THE END.



## THE DALESMEN OF EYAM.

BY CHRISTIAN BURKE.

IT was the fatal summer of 1666, and far away among the Derbyshire hills, the picturesque little village of Eyam, where now the modern tourist takes his peaceful holiday, was sore besieged. There was no sound of cannon or musketry, no flashing of swords or trampling of horses, no ringing tread of an armed host through the long quaint village street. Noiselessly yet resistlessly came the foe, and underneath the sultry summer sky was fought out day by day for four long weary months a strange and ghastly battle almost without its parallel in the pages of history.

Eyam, or the "Village of Waters" as it is sometimes called, is situated near the Derbyshire Peak. Sheltered from the winds by a thickly-wooded mountain range, it nestles at the foot of the hills in the very heart of the most beautiful and varied scenery, and luxuriant and fertile vegetation.

Sheltered in their own peaceful little valley, sowing and reaping their fruitful fields, plying their simple trades, it is probable that the villagers of Eyam knew and cared but little for the terrible pestilence that was raging in the great Metropolis and its vicinity, and was now approaching this quiet world-forgotten little hamlet to reap a yet more terrible harvest.

It was in the September of 1665 that the passing bell of Eyam tolled out for the soul of one George Vicars, a tailor, living in a little cottage not far from the churchyard. And then the rumour first spread from house to house as to the awful nature of the disease that had so suddenly swept off one who a few days before was hale and strong.

"They say it is the plague!" spoke the good-wife to her husband, dropping her voice as she uttered the dreaded word; and neighbour looked at neighbour with whitening lips and startled eyes; even the children stopped at their play and shivered as they heard of the fatal box of clothing which had been sent to the tailor by a relative in London, and which brought with it the seeds of death.

"God's mercy! who may be the next?" said the gossips as they spun their wheels before the door; and the lads and lassies gathered in the sunset light beside the stream hushed their laughter, and filled their pitchers in silence-as the news of that death broke in with solemn menace on their young and happy lives.

Thus it was that the pestilence first reached Eyam, and so virulent was it in form that all through the winter, in spite of the cold which usually held it in check, it claimed its victims by ones and twos, until

by the beginning of June 1666 some seventy-seven persons out of the small population had sickened and died.

During these months, to every house on which the ominous red cross was drawn came the good Rector William Mompesson in the exercise of his sacred calling, tending the sick, ministering the last rites to the dying, comforting the terrified and heart-broken mourners ; at once both priest, physician and friend, to his stricken flock.

The character of William Mompesson shines out amid these scenes of darkness and death as at once a leader of men, and a type of that self-devoted priesthood that in every age and every clime has been and is the glory of the Church of Christ.

But little is known of his early history. He came to Eyam in 1664, having previously married a young and beautiful girl named Catherine, the daughter of Ralph Carr of Cocken, in the county of Durham, and they had at the time of the outbreak two little children—George and Elizabeth, one of whom at least must have been scarcely out of babyhood.

That Mompesson was in the first instance somewhat disappointed at his preferment, probably desiring some more important and active field of labour, we gather from his own sad and self-reproachful letters written in the November of 1666 when the disease had done its worst, in which he laments his own ingratitude and want of appreciation of the blessings of his lot. Be that as it may, from the moment of the death of Vicars on to the bitter end of the following year he never faltered in his duties, never relaxed his efforts, never even in the agonising calamity that desolated his own home, shrank from his burden. But literally laid down his life, and that which was far more precious than life itself, in the service of his people, caring for nothing save that his Master's work might be done.

In the early part of June 1666, the pestilence broke out with redoubled fury, and the panic-stricken people were nearly beside themselves with fear. Catherine Mompesson, in an agony of grief, flung herself at her husband's feet, and besought him to fly from the doomed village with herself and their little children beyond the reach of the fell destroyer.

"The hireling fleeth because he *is* an hireling . . . the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." Nay ! he asked her—would she have him faithless to his God and to his orders ? Should the sick be untended, the dying unabsolved, the Holy Sacrifice uncelebrated, and the desolate unconsolated, that he might haply preserve in despicable security for a few days or months or years that life that was long ago given over to the service of the world's Redeemer ? There was a time of reckoning for all things ; should he one day have to stand before his Maker, and, overwhelmed with grief and shame, be able to make no answer when the solemn cry went forth, "Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock ?"

Then he in his turn sought to persuade her to leave him, and to

take the little ones who needed her so sorely, and go with them to their relatives in Derby. But Catherine had no fears for or thought of her own safety; and his entreaties only determined her to send away the children, though it almost broke her heart to separate from them; as for herself, her place was at her husband's side, and from this resolution nothing could move her.

There was no time for delay, and that same summer evening the two young parents kissed the smiling baby-faces, and, commending them to God, sent their dear ones away in the care of a trusted servant out of the baleful atmosphere that surrounded their once happy home. We can imagine how the mother wept and hung above her darlings, how she lingered wistfully at the door watching, long after the shadowy outline of their little forms and the waving of their tiny hands had become lost in the gathering darkness, and then turned wearily back into the house with a sad foreboding at her heart which told her that she should never look upon their faces any more.

It was at this juncture that Mompesson discovered that preparations were being rapidly made for a general flight. A few of the wealthier inhabitants had already indeed left, and the remainder, unable to bear their misery any longer, determined to quit the village in a body, heedless or ignorant that they would carry with them wherever they went the fatal pestilence, and sow it throughout the length and breadth of their own and the adjoining counties.

There is but little doubt that had this course been adopted the mournful history of Eyam would have been repeated in every village in Derbyshire, and instead of one little hamlet the entire surrounding country side would have been devastated. At this supreme moment Mompesson faced the difficulties of his position with a courage and a wisdom that under God saved the lives of many thousands of people. Calling his terror-stricken flock together he made a passionate appeal to them, entreating them to reconsider their decision. He pointed out that there was not the slightest security that such a measure would save their own lives, steeped as they were in infection; and that there was an absolute certainty that wherever they went they would carry with them a baleful death, bringing sorrow and desolation into countless happy and unsuspecting homes. He put before them an heroic alternative—that they should isolate themselves within the narrow confines of their little village, letting the plague work its will upon them, for whom, as he frankly told them, there was but little chance of escape; and thus by this means save their brethren.

When one considers how strong in human nature is the hope and love of life, how almost uncontrollable the unreasoning fear, the impulse towards flight from an imminent and unknown danger on the part of a number of persons animated both by the same dread and desire, one would not have been surprised had Mompesson's words fallen on deaf ears, and hearts deadened to all thought or care for any

save themselves. But to the lasting honour and glory of Eyam, the appeal was not made in vain.

Mompesson, looking into the troubled faces round him, told them that if they would but promise solemnly before God to abide by his conditions, no want or needless suffering should fall upon them. He would at once write to the nobility and gentry of the neighbourhood, and arrange for all supplies and necessities to be brought from without, to given places on the outskirts of the village, while a boundary should be set beyond which none should pass either from without or from within.

Thus, he said, shutting in among themselves their fell enemy, they would cripple its power, burying it if need be in their own graves, until in His own good time God should see fit to lay to His hand and deliver them therefrom. Until that day let them be patient and brave, resting in the sure and certain hope that even the sufferings of this present time were as nothing to the glory that was to come; while death itself, however terrible, was but after all a gateway opening into everlasting life.

Something of the speaker's enthusiasm must have flashed back from the worn and haggard faces of his listeners—something of that greater love, that spirit of self-abnegation that attained its Divine culmination on the Cross of Him who died for the whole world, must have found an echo in the hearts of those simple, unlettered folk, for no dissentient voice was raised—with one accord they accepted Mompesson's conditions, and the promise made was kept unbroken to the last.

From that time forward there was neither going in nor coming out of Eyam—without, the plague, like an invisible wall, surrounded the devoted little village; while from within, a still more impassable barrier that their own hearts and consciences had raised, barred all communication with the outer world.\*

In response to Mompesson's letters, the gentry of the neighbourhood, and more especially the Earl of Devonshire, undertook to supply the village with all necessaries and provisions. "A kind of circle," says the chief authority on matters connected with Eyam, "was drawn round the village, marked by particular and well-known stones and hills, beyond which it was solemnly agreed no one of the villagers should pass, whether infected or no. This circle extended about half a mile round the village, and to two or three places or points in this boundary provisions were brought. A well or rivulet northward of Eyam, called to this day Mompesson's Well or Brook, was one of the places where articles were deposited. These articles were brought very

\* The only exceptions appear to have been that one wet day a carter of Bubnell chose to drive through Eyam, and on another occasion a poor woman, under some pressing necessity, attempted to reach the market at Tideswell. Both met with rude treatment from the terrified people, when it became known from whence they had come.

early in the morning by persons from adjacent villages, who when they had delivered them beside the well, fled with the precipitation of panic. Individuals appointed by Mompesson and Stanley fetched the articles left, and when they took money it was placed in the well or certain stone troughs to be purified; thus preventing contagion by passing from hand to hand. . . . When money was sent, it was only for some extra or particular articles, the provisions and many other necessaries were supplied, it is supposed, by the Earl of Devonshire." . . . "The wisdom of Mompesson," continues this writer, "can only be surpassed by the courage of the inhabitants in not trespassing beyond the bounds marked out." \*

For the magnificence of their sacrifice to stand out in its true proportions, it must also be borne in mind that these were but a handful of simple country folk, many of them ignorant and uncultured, with all the prejudices and superstitions of their class. They had been ready to put faith in every infallible remedy, and in everything that promised the slightest hope of escape; to them it would have probably seemed that in flight lay their one chance of personal immunity, and the surrender of this hope must have been a sore effort. A surrender which, together with their patient endurance, their loyal obedience to the one man who had the wisdom to conceive and the nerve and devotion to carry out this difficult enterprise, had its source alike in that Faith which knows nothing of self-interest or self-preservation, but only of self-renunciation.

All through the months of June, July, and August, the plague continued to rage with unabated fury. The sunny village street was deserted; the roses bloomed and faded all ungathered; the cattle lowed untended in the meadows; the fruit hung in blighted clusters in the orchards; and the waving corn ripened in the fields, but none had heart or strength to reap the harvest. The weather was hot and sultry; the atmosphere loaded and oppressive, and the sunshine fell with sickly glare into the chambers where, one after another, men, women, and little children laid them down to die.

The dust gathered on the spinning-wheel, for the good wives talked no more before their doors; neighbour shrank from neighbour, fearing the slightest contact, and the few old gossips who lingered now and then in the grass-grown streets, where the rabbits and hares sported undismayed in the broad daylight, no longer exchanged their wonted cheerful, idle chat, but had only to tell in mournful whispers how the strange "white cricket" had been seen on such and such a one's now deserted hearth, and how the mournful baying of "Gabriel's hounds" had been heard at night beneath the windows of the latest victim of the disease.

The annual festival of rejoicing for the harvest, always held on St. Helen's Day, was this year quite forgotten. The church was closed, for it was deemed dangerous to crowd the people together

\* "History of Eyam."

within its walls. No bells rang from the belfry; the very gates of the churchyard were closed, and the dead were buried in any open space of ground near their homes.

House after house was visited by the destroying angel; husband and wife, mother and child, young and old, were smitten down before him. Some sinking away in a deadly stupor, others racked with pain and tormented almost to the verge of madness by a raging fever. Relatives buried their own dead in the nearest field, until the last member of a family died, and then some friend or neighbour, or hired hand, hastily dug their narrow grave. From the 5th to the 30th of July perished the entire family of the fated Talbots of Riley, numbering seven persons. And early in August Elizabeth Hancock buried with her own hands her husband, three stalwart sons, and three blooming daughters. Strangely enough, though weakened by her awful watching, and prostrate with grief, she herself escaped the disease, passing the remainder of her days peacefully with her only surviving child, a son, who was at the time fortunately apprenticed in Sheffield.

Amid this scene of gloom and misery the only bright spot in the picture is in the figures of William and Catherine Mompesson going to and fro on tireless errands of mercy. All that skill or tenderness could do for their suffering people was done by that devoted couple, who went fearlessly in and out of the infected dwellings. Mompesson's own description, written shortly after the visitation was over, is so graphic that it cannot be omitted:

"The condition of this place was so sad that I persuade myself it did exceed *all history and example*. Our town hath become a Golgotha, the place of a skull; and had there not been a small remnant left we had been as Sodom and Gomorrah. My ears never heard such doleful lamentations. My nose never smelled such horrid smells, and my eyes never beheld such ghastly spectacles. There have been seventy-six families visited within my parish, out of which 259 persons died."

Fearing any longer to hold service in the church, twice in the week, and every Sunday, Mompesson gathered together his fast-dwindling flock in the Delf, a picturesque and secluded little dell, where from an ivy-covered rock, which served as a rude pulpit, he spoke to them words of hope and cheer, and where, like Phineas of old, he stood up and poured forth his passionate prayer to God that the plague might be stayed.

The people sat below him on the grassy slope, each one a little removed from the other. The instinct of common sorrow which draws men together, the kind and sympathising voice of their one earthly friend, and their simple unwavering faith in their Heavenly Father, in whom, although He slew them, yet would they trust—brought them at each summons to their accustomed place. But their eyes were heavy with weakness, and dulled with unshed tears, their brains reeling at the greatness of the calamity that had befallen



them, and they had no strength left save to join, with faltering lips in their pastor's solemn and ceaseless supplication.

*"In all time of our tribulation . . . in the hour of death and in the day of Judgement : Good Lord, deliver us !"*

Mompesson kept in his usual health ; although always "an ailing man," he yet seemed to bear a charmed life in the midst of the disease which overpowered strong and weak alike. But the sword of the Angel of Death was already stretched out over the peaceful Rectory. It was on the 22nd of August that Mompesson was walking, with his young wife on his arm—she was only twenty-six years of age—about the fields adjoining their home. They were talking the one to the other—possibly about their absent little ones—when she suddenly exclaimed, "Oh ! the air—how sweet it smells !" At her words her husband's heart failed him, for already within his knowledge the same sensation and the same words had been a forerunner of the dread disease.

A few short hours proved all too soon the fatal truth. Vainly Mompesson sought every remedy, and nursed his darling with ceaseless and unremitting zeal. Love for her husband and her helpless children enabled her for a time to strive against her sickness, but her sorely-tried strength failed rapidly, and she died peacefully in her husband's arms. What an agony of grief rings out from the cry with which the sorrow-stricken man yielded up his treasure to his God—"Farewell—farewell all happy days !"

Catherine Mompesson's death stirred the whole remnant of the village from their dull apathy to quick and living sorrow. From every quarter they came, weeping for her who had so often wept for them, and forgetting their own deep griefs in the bitter calamity that had overtaken their Rector.

He buried his wife in Eyam churchyard, close to the east end of the chancel, and on her grave where the morning sunlight shines is still to be read the half-obliterated, significant inscription—

"MORS MIHI LUCRUM."

After she was laid to rest, Mompesson roused himself from his mourning to resume his labours among his people. In a letter to his children, dated Aug. 31, 1666, he pours out something of the trouble that was oppressing his soul :

"Dear Hearts," he writes, "this brings you the doleful news of your dear mother's death—the greatest loss that ever befell you. I am not only deprived of a kind and loving comfort, but you are also bereaved of the most indulgent mother that ever dear children had . . . . But we must comfort ourselves in God . . . . that the loss is only ours, and that what is our sorrow is her gain. The consideration of her joys, which I do assure myself are unutterable, should refresh our drooping spirits. My dear hearts, your blessed mother lived a

most holy life and made a most comfortable and happy end, and is now invested with a crown of righteousness."

Then he goes on to dwell with pathetic insistence on the virtues of that mother whose memory he would fain have live in her children's hearts—her piety and devotion, "which were according to the exact principles of the Church of England"—her modesty and humility, her charity and frugality, her housewifely zeal. "Her discourse ever grave and meek, yet pleasant withal."

Writing to his friend and patron, Sir George Saville, on Sept. 1, Mompesson says :

"Dear and honoured Sir,—This is the saddest news that ever my pen could write. The destroying Angel having taken up his quarters within my habitation, my dearest wife is gone to her eternal rest, and is invested with a crown of righteousness, having made a happy end. Indeed, had she loved herself as well as me, she had fled from this pit of destruction with the sweet babes, and might have prolonged her days ; but she was resolved to die a martyr to my interests."

That he considered his own end must be rapidly approaching is evident from the terms in which he commends his children to his patron's care, and takes farewell of him and all his house ; his letter closes with the following words :

"Dear Sir, I beg the prayers of all about you that I may not be daunted at the powers of hell, and that I may have dying graces ; with tears I beg that when you are praying for fatherless orphans you will remember my two pretty babes."

But it was not to be. The death of Catherine Mompesson may be considered as the closing act of the terrible drama. In September the weather became slightly cooler, and the number of deaths only amounted to twenty-four as against the seventy-three that had perished in August alone. On the 11th of October the wind shifted to the east, and the plague suddenly and entirely ceased. From that day there were no fresh deaths, and the remnant of the little village began slowly to take heart again, and to try to restore in some measure their ruined homes. Out of a population of 350 no less than 267 had died—259 of plague, according to Mompesson, and the remaining eight of other diseases ; therefore the entire muster of the once happy and prosperous hamlet numbered only 83 souls, including the Rector himself, and such of the children as had escaped the epidemic. The winter months were spent in destroying, as far as possible, bedding, clothing, and furniture, and purifying and fumigating all necessary articles of apparel ; while every means that the sanitary knowledge of the time, and the forethought of Mompesson could suggest, was adopted to prevent a recurrence of the disease.

Writing to his uncle on November 20th, he says :

"Now (blessed be God) all our fears are over, for none have died of plague since the 11th of October, and the pest houses have long been empty. I intend—God willing—to spend this week in seeing

all the woollen clothing fumed and purified, as well for the satisfaction as for the safety of the country. Here have been such burning of goods that the like I think was never known. For my part, I have scarcely apparel to shelter my body, having wasted more than I needed for the sake of example. During this dreadful visitation I have not had the least symptom of disease, nor had I ever better health."

A village ravaged by soldiery or destroyed by fire could hardly have presented a more piteous and desolate aspect than that of Eyam at this period. The people, shattered in health and oppressed with sadness, crept languidly about the streets, and began slowly and fitfully to resume their ordinary avocations. In almost every homestead there must have been some missing face, "some vacant chair," and many of the houses were utterly closed and falling into ruins, for those who had once inhabited them had arisen and gone hence, and the place thereof would know them no more.

Still, as the days passed on, bringing the assurance that the plague was at last overcome, the little band would begin to gather hope again. Dull eyes would brighten, neighbour again seek neighbour, instead of shrinking from all communication with their kind, and the happy quick-forgetting laugh of the children would once more be heard; while here and there one and another from the surrounding hamlets would venture to cross that formidable barrier, to see how it fared with the good people of Eyam, and who was living, and who, alas! was dead.

The re-opening of the long-closed church must have been quite an event, and the sound of the old familiar chimes ringing out on the still frosty air their solemn message, *Jesus bee ovr spede*, must have wakened countless memories—thoughts both of pain and thankfulness—in the hearts of those who had never hoped to hear them again.

To this period belongs the sad and romantic little story of "Rowland and his Emmot," still carefully remembered among the village traditions. A gentle pretty girl, Emmot Sydall of Eyam, was betrothed to a young farmer living in Middleton Dale. The outburst of the plague of course separated the lovers, for the young man apparently had those at home to whom he dared not run the risk of bringing infection. Rumours of Emmot's death reached him, but he hardly seemed to have credited them, and as soon as ingress was permitted he passed the fatal line, and sought the once bright and cheerful cottage. He crossed the grass-grown threshold—no one answered his summons, and only his own voice echoed hollowly through the deserted house. The half-open door swung creaking back on its rusty hinges. All was still, the chairs and tables stood in their accustomed places covered with dust, and on the black and desolate hearth the rank grass was growing and the green damp moss was creeping silently from brick to brick of the red tiled floor. The pewter vessels were flecked with rust; the old Dutch clock was

pointing with mournful finger to a bygone hour—the linnet lay dead in its cage—only the shadow of death and decay brooded over all things. For a stronger wooer than Rowland had claimed his Emmot ; she lay asleep in the grassy dell, and neither his love nor his tears could bring her back to him.

A few scattered hints remain as to Mompesson's subsequent history, which after that year of fiery trial seems to have been peaceful and uneventful. He remained at Eyam until 1669, when he was presented to the Rectory of Eakring, Notts. He was made Prebendary of York and Southwell, having previously refused, in favour of a friend, the Deanery of Lincoln. It is somewhat disappointing to find that he married again, and yet it is pleasant to think of him once more with a happy home, and little children round him. Of George and Elizabeth Mompesson but little is known. The former took Orders, and was Rector of Barnborough ; but whatever their after-career, the children of such parents could scarcely fail to realise their father's prayer, uttered for them in the extremity of his sorrow—"I am not desirous that they should be great, but good." Mompesson died at Eakring in 1708, in the seventieth year of his age. His body rests in the chancel of Eakring Church, "in the hope of a blessed resurrection," and his memory is a deathless heritage to his race.

Such is the story of the Dalesmen of Eyam : a story of patient endurance, of steadfast and unselfish heroism on the part of an entire community, which is perhaps almost unique among the records of the past.

The praise of men, the wondering admiration of the world of later days, which probably in their own time counted their lives madness and their deaths without honour, had no part in the thoughts of these simple dalesmen, as they turned at that solemn appeal and went back every man to his own house. Of what should be said of them in the days to come, and of how their memory would shed a lustre round their tiny unknown village that would never fade away, they knew and recked but little. They only knew that they heard the voice of their Lord cutting across their questionings and fears, and calling to them to follow Him as He called His disciples of old. And they did follow Him, nothing wavering, along that bitter way of the Cross which led them through the grave and gate of death into everlasting life.

*"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend."*

To sit down patiently with empty hands and wait the coming of death in one of its most terrible and hideous forms, requires a courage, surely, as deep and strong as to face the torturer's rack, the scathing fire, and the glittering axe and sword. And among the glorious martyrs of God not least perhaps in the Kingdom of Heaven are some of those men and women who sleep for the most part in nameless graves sown broadcast over the green and fertile fields of Eyam.

## THE SEÑORITA'S GHOST.

"YOU see that quaint little mound," said Doña Pilar; "that is the Señorita's grave."

"She never rests there," growled José Maria. "She is doing penance."

"Why?" asked the young Englishman, Mark Lairt.

She was bad—very bad!"

"How do you know that, José Maria?" said the old lady sharply, swinging round on him, and throwing back her head. She was strangely excited, and clutched her neck convulsively with one black-gloved hand.

"I know it because I know it," answered José Maria mumblingly; "and Heaven knows best of all."

"Who are you, José Maria, to prate of what Heaven knows? Shut your mouth and learn reverence."

The old man turned aside muttering, but he dared not argue with the Señora.

Then she swung herself round with the same jerky movement as before, and spoke to the young Englishman beside her.

"How would you like to be buried here?"

He looked rather surprised at the question, and the old lady laughed horribly.

"Here!" he said, shrugging his shoulders. "I would rather lay my bones in England."

"Be thankful," retorted she sharply—"be thankful if you get as good as this. My grandfather was eaten by fierce pigs. They killed him too!"

"Good Heavens! how did that happen?"

"My grandmother kept fierce pigs and—well, she was jealous. Now let us go on."

She swung round again, and led the way through a tangle of garden that by daylight was brilliant with crimson passion-flowers and hibiscus, and fragrant with tall shrubs of sweet-scented verbenas and rosemary. The nispero trees were bowing down with luscious yellow fruit, and the cherries blushed amongst their green leaves.

The house stood at one end of the garden, where a fountain dripped lazily, and frogs were already croaking in the evening light.

"Who was the Señorita?" asked Mark Lairt, with a sudden uncontrollable desire to know.

The old lady swung round angrily.

"It's no matter to you, Mark Lairt! Ask nothing, and you will hear no lies."

They passed through a creeper-grown verandah, and entered the

house. It was a low, old-fashioned, straggling *hacienda* house, built round a *patio*. The flooring was of red tiles, broken and uneven. The furniture was scanty, shabby, and quaintly old-fashioned.

Mark looked about him with interest. This, then, was his heritage. Years ago, when he was a mere child, a letter had come from his uncle Mark, of whom the family had heard nothing for half a century, saying that he had buried himself in this remote corner of Chile, and that his property and fortune should eventually belong to the boy Mark, who, he particularly requested, should be taught Spanish thoroughly. Then he wrote again, some ten years later, saying he felt death was near, and bidding Mark wait until he had attained the age of twenty-five before coming to claim his heritage, unless he should be summoned before that time, by the death of his aunt, who was a Chilian, in which case he should be duly informed of the event.

From that day there came no further communication, beyond the news of the old man's death; and Mark, in course of time, being unable to obtain any answer to his letters, had, when he reached the age of twenty-five, announced his intention of visiting his aunt, and had at last arrived at the out-of-the-way *hacienda* on the frontier where she lived.

After riding about ten miles from the nearest station, leaving his baggage to follow him on a pack-mule, he and his guide—a taciturn Chilian *huaso*, or countryman—found themselves before a tumble-down gate, leading into the tangle of garden already described, where they first saw the old lady.

"I know who you are," she had said at once. "You are Mark Lairt, come to get what you can."

"I have come in accordance with my uncle's wishes," said he, speaking in Spanish, which he knew perfectly. "You are my aunt."

The old lady laughed a horrible laugh.

"Ave Maria! Your aunt!"

She was a strange-looking old lady, with a very erect and graceful way of holding herself. She appeared to be slight and well-made, but her figure was shrouded in a long black jacket, that gave her a quaint aspect. Over this she wore a thick black gauze *manto*, which covered her head, and was drawn down over her face like a veil. Mark could see no feature distinctly, and even her eyes were barricaded by large blue spectacles. She had a wonderfully elastic, springy walk, and an energetic yet graceful way of swinging herself round to speak to any one. Mark, as he stood hat in hand, holding his horse by the gate, and greeting this odd old lady, thought it was a strange experience, and instinctively felt that he was an unwelcome guest.

"You can send your guide away," said Doña Pilar decidedly. "He can have nothing here. José Mar-i-a! José Ma-ri-a!" she shouted loudly, in a strong, clear voice.



A shrivelled old man appeared, an old man with red and bleared eyes, and a toothless, mumbling mouth. He was dressed in a red and yellow striped *poncho*, which hung loosely over his sharp shoulders, and a flapping white *chupaya* hat was tied by greasy black ribbons under his stubbly chin.

"José Maria," Doña Pilar had said then, "take the horse."

José Maria took it, and stood waiting. Mark pulled out some money and paid his guide, explaining that he must return at once, and asking him to send on the luggage as soon as possible. Though he tipped the man well, it went to his heart to send off man and beast without refreshment.

"Let him take back the horse, too," said the old lady. "There are plenty here without it. Now follow me."

Mark walked along the garden path behind her, and was joined in a few minutes by José Maria, who had delivered up the horse, and who came hobbling after them.

And then it was that the old lady suddenly stopped, swung herself round to speak to Mark, and pointed out the Señorita's grave.

When they entered the house, Doña Pilar turned to Mark again. "A fine heritage!" she said derisively. "Come, I will show you your room."

They passed through the *patio*, where the pavement was green with age, and the damp that oozed from a stagnant pool, which had once been the ornamental basin of a fountain, now all broken and leaking. The Señora led the way through an empty room, into another *patio* beyond; their footsteps echoed strangely in the deserted place, and rats scurried away disturbed by the sound. Doña Pilar pulled out a rusty key, and opened a door. The room into which they entered had that peculiar damp, musty smell that comes in rooms with *adobe* walls, that have been too much shut up. Mark walked to the window and looked out. The moon had risen and poured in its pale light just as the day suddenly waned.

"A pretty old garden," said Mark, trying hard to be pleasant.

At the same instant something gleaming caught his eye. It was the moonlight on the white stone of the Señorita's grave.

The old woman laughed the same horrible laugh.

"This is the Señorita's room," she said. "I have given it to you."

Then she went out suddenly and shut the door. Mark looked round the room. A heavy wooden bedstead stood in one corner. It had been a four-poster once, but the top had been cut off. There was a shabby chest of drawers, and a shabbier cupboard, two chairs and an old wash-hand stand. A door led out of the room on either side, communicating with the next rooms, as is usual in *patio* houses. Mark tried one door. It was locked: the other had the heavy cupboard in front of it, reaching to the top of the frame, but not covering the small window above the door, which disfigures most Chilean

rooms, and which very often is not made to open, and cannot even serve the original intention of ventilation.

The French window which led to the verandah, had neither curtains, blinds, shutters nor fastenings of any sort. He threw it wide open, and stood looking out : the Señorita's grave had a sort of fascination for him. Who was the Señorita ? He had never heard of any one except his uncle and aunt. His uncle was dead, and his aunt was the strange old lady ; but who was the Señorita ?

He was startled out of his meditations by the sound of a cracked dinner-bell. Mark looked at his watch, and found that it was already long past seven o'clock—a wonderfully late hour for the *hacienda* dinner, which had evidently been postponed for him. He could make little toilet, for his luggage had not yet arrived ; so, still in his riding gear, he soon crossed the damp *patio*, where the frogs were croaking loudly, and the bats were wheeling and circling in the shadow.

"There does not seem to be a living soul here, except the Señora and José Maria," thought Mark, and he subsequently found he was right. José Maria cooked and served the dinner—a terribly greasy meal ; José Maria made the beds ; José Maria watered the garden. There was not another soul.

"This way," cried the Señora's voice to Mark, as he hesitated where to go. "Here is the dining-room."

He entered a long low room with a bare tiled floor, lighted by one small window almost covered with white flowering jessamine. There was a long deal table, with a piece of dirty brown American cloth at one end, where two places were laid, with common white plates, coarse tumblers, grimy-handled knives and folks and spoons. Mark wondered what had become of the old family silver, of which he had heard his uncle had a large store.

He was young and strong, and roughing it had no difficulties for him. He rather enjoyed the experience, and wondered what was coming next. The room was very dark : the whole house was dark, and he could hardly see the Señora ; but he noticed that she still wore a sort of veil, and that the black gloves had not been taken off. "Perhaps that is just as well," thought the young man, philosophically.

José Maria brought in a paraffin lamp that smoked and smelt horribly. Then he popped down a big basin of *casuela*, in which floated islands of grease in a thick yellow fluid. José Maria poured out the beer, which was even viler than the *casuela*, and José Maria's own fair hands plumped down a bit of bread beside each plate.

Mark was a philosopher ; he merely made up his mind that more than a fair average of the proverbial peck of dirt would have to be eaten during his stay at the hacienda.

Suddenly the old lady startled him by breaking the silence.

"Only you and I and the Señorita's ghost !"

"Where is the ghost?" asked Mark, calmly.

"You find out for yourself, Mark Lairt, and don't ask questions," said she.

José Maria begun mumbling to himself as he served.

"She rests little enough in her grave. That know I—none better than I." Then he gave a sudden chuckle, and as suddenly grew grave again.

The Señora said nothing.

"How large is the farm, Señora?" by way of again breaking the silence. For the life of him, Mark could not bring himself to call the horrible old woman "aunt."

"You wait till I am dead, Mark Lairt—dead and buried, and then find out for yourself. You are not 'patron' here yet."

"Not yet," repeated José Maria, like a ghostly echo.

"Señora, you misunderstand me. I only wish to find a subject that interests you."

"Shut your mouth and say nothing, Mark Lairt! You are a fool, as your uncle was before you."

"*Caramba!*" said José Maria, unexpectedly. "A fool! A fool!"

"Shut your mouth, too, José Maria," she cried angrily. "Do you want to be out there too—out there, where the Señorita's grave is?"

"What must be, must be; but the Señorita was a devil."

"Prating old fool! Devils don't die."

"*Quien sabe?* Who knows?" said the old man, and he nodded his head significantly. "That's what I think myself—devils don't die."

Then he put a fowl down before the Señora, who carved it with an ease that told of strong muscles.

She only spoke one other word to Mark during dinner, and that was "More?" jerking her head upwards, and looking first at Mark and then at the dish.

The only thing that Mark found palatable was the fruit, and it was delicious and abundant.

"Now smoke," said the Señora, suddenly getting up, when the meal was over; "and go to bed when you like. Good-night!"

So Mark went out, and sat among the passion-flowers in the verandah, for it was pleasanter than the stuffy, fusty rooms. He wished he could hear a little more than the Señora seemed inclined to tell him about his heritage, and he wondered how he could get hold of his uncle's will, and find out what was really coming to him, so as to take it and clear out as fast as he could.

Then he began to wonder about the Señorita. Certainly there was a mystery concerning her, and he sat and smoked and mused in the glorious moonlight. Suddenly his quick eye noticed a moving shadow just below the verandah, which was raised several feet above

the level of the garden, and was approached by steps. He got up and looked over, and there, with the moonshine full on it, he saw the upturned face of a very beautiful woman, with strange and lovely eyes. Her figure was lost in the shadow. In an instant Mark had vaulted over the railing, and alighted in the garden below, but the face was gone. He hunted round, and could see nothing, except that a tiny door in the brickwork below the verandah was now tightly closed, and he could swear it had been half-open when he passed it, on first entering the house.

"By Jove! the Señorita's ghost!" said he to himself. "The poor Señorita!"

He fancied he heard a soft sigh somewhere, but not a sign of the ghost was to be seen.

In a few minutes he heard in the distant *patio* the Señora's voice calling angrily, "José Maria!—José Maria, you old fool, go to bed. You will be sleeping too late in the morning, José Maria."

Mark listened to the sound of the old man's tottering footsteps; then they died away, and he lit another cigarette, and sat watching in hopes that the Señorita's ghost would appear again. But he grew tired, and went off to bed, healthy and sleepy, and untroubled by nerves, or by the dead Señorita or the living Señora.

His portmanteau had arrived by now, and as he was stooping and unpacking it, by the light of the moon, which streamed in through the open window, he suddenly became conscious of the uncanny feeling that he was being watched. He looked up quickly, and distinctly saw to his surprise, in the narrow window above the door, behind the wardrobe, the same beautiful sad face watching him. It disappeared into the shadow when their eyes met.

"I don't mind betting," said Mark to himself, "that there has been foul play here. I believe the old demon herself murdered the Señorita."

Then he undressed and went to bed, and slept the dreamless sleep of youth and health, but the last thing his eyes rested on that night, and the first thing they saw in the morning—at night bathed in silvery moonshine, in the morning glowing in golden sunshine—was the white stone, and the quaint mound of the Señorita's grave.

## II.

THE next morning Mark was awakened by the sunlight that streamed in through the window. He jumped up and began to wonder about the ways and means of tubbing, and sallied forth in pursuit of José Maria.

The old man was lighting up the kitchen fire when Mark explained his requirements.

"*Caramba!* just like the old patron," said the old man gazing at

him with a sort of faint admiration in his looks. "*Caramba!*" you are like him too, Patroncito, and he, yes, he had the good heart. He gave me flannel when my pains were bad, and good cognac—good cognac! Ave Maria! how good it was to warm up the stomach."

"All right, José Maria, you and I shall get along first-rate too, I am sure. You go and buy your flannels the next time you go to town, and I will see after the cognac. There's something for you."

"What is it?" mumbled the old fellow, trembling with excitement; "ten dollars! Ave Maria! Do not tell the Señora. God will repay you, Patroncito—God and the blessed Virgin; and I will serve you—yes, you will see."

"What about the bath?"

"*Diantre!* there is the old patron's bath, but the Señora would kill me if I took you there," and he chuckled to himself quietly. "Better go to the *estanque*—the big tank up above the garden."

"All right; but why can I not have my uncle's bath?"

"Because," said the old man mysteriously, lowering his voice nervously—"because"—then he looked round furtively, and even glanced over his shoulders, though he was standing with his back to the wall—"there is the room next door."

"What of that?"

"Leave that room alone, Patroncito; better have nothing to do with it. Let the devil look after his own work."

"José Mar-i-a—José Ma-ri-a," shouted Doña Pilar in the front patio.

"*Ya voy!* I am coming"; and the old man hobbled off.

"Where is the *estanque*, José Maria?" Mark called after him, determined to have his bath come what might.

"Up the hill behind the garden, where the willows grow, Patroncito."

Mark had not much difficulty in finding it; and after a refreshing swim in the reservoir, which was shaded by the willows, whose green foliage formed a deliciously cool screen, he made his way back to the house again, entering by a back door, which he found open, and which was an evident short cut.

As he passed through another back yard, which he had not seen before, he looked unconsciously into a small room, and saw to his surprise that it was a comparatively comfortably fitted-up bath-room, evidently long disused.

"By Jove! the bath-room!" thought Mark, stepping in, inspired with curiosity by the old man's words.

A strange odour pervaded the place. It was different from anything he had ever smelt before, and it struck him as an extraordinary mixture of antiseptics and corruption. He looked round, but there was nothing to account for it. Then he noticed a door leading into another room, and, approaching it, found that the strong smell, whatever it might be, came from that direction. "Perhaps she

concocts some horrible medicines, or something; dried black cats and owls; who knows?" thought Mark; "and that is why she does not like any one to know about it."

Then it struck him that it would be easy to see into the room from the verandah, and he had the curiosity to go round and try. But the window was completely closed by boards, which were evidently nailed from the inside.

He went back to his own room, and finished dressing, then he made his way to the dining-room.

"You had better take a cup of tea and some bread, Mark Lairt," said the Señora, who sat there in the dim light, for the creepers over the small window almost darkened the room. "There is no butter here," she went on.

Mark said politely that it was not of the slightest consequence.

"How long are you going to stay, Mark Lairt?" said Doña Pilar.

He saw his opportunity, and told her that he was merely waiting her pleasure to discuss affairs, take what he was entitled to and be off.

The Señora looked at him triumphantly, he fancied. "And the will, Mark Lairt?"

"And the will," he repeated quietly.

"You are powerless without the will, fool."

"That remains to be proved, Doña Pilar; if you are unwilling to enlighten me, I suppose my uncle's lawyer will do so."

"The old lawyer is dead, and there is no other, Mark Lairt. You had better go home, and wait until I am dead. You are not patron yet."

"Why, Doña Pilar," replied he good-naturedly, "you might live a hundred years. I am entitled to my share, whatever it is, irrespective of you. Remember I am twenty-five."

"Twenty-five—Ave Maria! twenty-five. If I had had you to bring up, you would never have reached twenty-five."

"You are very kind, Doña Pilar," laughingly, "but here I am a living certainty, and I am twenty-five."

"My grandfather was eaten up by pigs," said she slowly—"killed and eaten by horrible pigs, fierce pigs, because a woman wished it so."

"I have not seen any about here though, Señora."

Doña Pilar jumped up, and swung out of the room. "José Mar-i-a—José Ma-ri-a," she shouted, and went off to find him.

A few minutes later, José Maria put his head round the door of the dining-room, then stole in and shut it noiselessly.

"Patroncito," said he mysteriously, "she is dressing to ride to town. She is after the money." He bent down, and began to pull off an old worn boot full of holes.

"Poor old beggar," thought Mark; "a shame to let an old man like that go about with such boots." Then he asked José if he had no money to buy clothes with



"Not a cent since the old patron died. Not a half cent. Food and lodging only, food and—lodging;" the word came out with a jerk, caused by the effort in getting off his boot.

"Here," said Mark, giving him some money, "get yourself some boots, man."

The old fellow waved it aside. "It is not that, Patroncito"—he had pulled off a terribly old sock by now—"it is *this*," and out of the sock he produced a small packet. "I have carried this eight long years for you. The patron gave it to me before he died. 'When the Patroncito comes, it will be in eight years, José Maria,' he said. 'I can trust no one here, not even the lawyer; but I can trust you.' And every year, I have cut a notch here on this very door, on the morning of the *purísima* when he died—here on this very door, Patroncito, for in this very room he gave it to me."

Mark took the packet with an exclamation of astonishment, and pushed some money into the old withered hand. "Wait, Patroncito," whispered José Maria in a terrified whisper, "for the love of Heaven, do not open it until she is gone. The dead and the living have eyes."

Then he shuffled away, and Mark saw him in a few minutes leading round two horses. The Señora mounted one, and the old man the other. Mark, who had intended to go too, whether she wished it or not, in order to find out something about the money, was now only too glad to see her off, and have a quiet time to look at the packet.

"I leave you," said Doña Pilar, "to the Señorita's ghost." And so saying, she rode off, with the sound of horrible laughter.

Mark went back to the verandah, and taking out his pocket-knife, cut the string of the sealed packet. The outside covering was of oil-silk, and the letter inside was clean and well preserved.

It was from his uncle. The letter contained a statement of affairs, and proved, to Mark's astonishment, that he had come in for a sum of dollars that was equivalent to £100,000, in bonds and hard cash; and the property, and a comfortable annuity left to his aunt, were also to fall to him at her death. There was besides a legacy of 50,000 dollars to Madelina, whom Mark concluded must have been the Señorita, and fifty dollars a month was to be paid to his faithful servant José Maria, in order that he should work no more, but end his days in peace.

"Poor old fellow!" thought Mark; "much money or much peace he has had since that old demon took up the reins. Why, there is about 5000 dollars owing him by now. Never mind! My lady, I think I am about even with you now. I should not mind laying an even bet that you murdered the Señorita."

Then he lit a cigar and began to think what was the best course to pursue; and being a man of decision and having made up his mind that the Señora was up to no good, he went out, caught the best looking horse he could see in the *corral*, saddled it, and started off to town

He did not hurry himself much, as he did not want to overtake Doña Pilar and awake her suspicions. So he rode leisurely.

It was an hour and a half before he reached the little town, and the heat was intense by this time. He asked his way to the bank, and went there first to make inquiries. He found, scarcely to his surprise, that for the last year, the Señora had been drawing the money out as quickly as possible, and that she had long since carried away the strong box, containing the bonds, jewellery and other valuables, which had been deposited there by his uncle. She had already visited the bank that day and had drawn out the last of the cash.

As no one had ever heard of the will, the bank manager had imagined that it was all right, and that the Señora was sole heir, for there had been no one to dispute the fact; but they all felt greatly puzzled to know what the old lady had done with the money.

Mark produced the will and explained the circumstances. "She must have the money in the house," said the bank manager, "for it is impossible that she has taken it away. She knows no one."

Then he advised Mark to take the advice of the best lawyer in Chile, adding that he would need a pretty sharp one to outwit the Señora. "It is only within the last year that we have seen much of her. The Señorita used to manage everything."

"Who was the Señorita?" asked Mark. But he could get little satisfaction, for no one knew much about her. She was supposed to be the daughter of Doña Pilar's first husband, for the Señora was a widow when Mark's uncle had married her late in life, and Madelina had come to live in the *hacienda* when Doña Pilar became mistress there. She had died very suddenly about thirteen months before Mark's visit. She was a very beautiful woman.

Of one thing, and one thing only, Mark felt sure, and that was that she had met with foul play, and that her memory was much maligned.

He rode quickly back to the *hacienda*, his head full of projects, and arrived at the house before Doña Pilar had returned. He unsaddled his horse, groomed it, fed it, and turned it into the *corral*; then went to sit and smoke in the verandah.

"If the Señorita's ghost is about," he thought to himself, "now is her time."

But though he sat there for a good hour, he never saw a sign of the beautiful face that had made such an impression on him.

In course of time the Señora and José María returned.

"I hope you have had a pleasant day, Señora," said he, meaningly.

"A pleasanter day than you are ever likely to have, Mark Lairt," said she.

"Look here, Señora, you and I need not waste many words between us. I, too, have been to the bank; I want to know what you have done with my uncle's money—with my money?"

José Maria, who had crept up noiselessly, gave a startlingly sudden cackle, and as suddenly grew grave.

"Go off about your business, old fool!" said the Señora sharply, "or you will laugh the wrong way. And you, Mark Lairt, where is the will?"

"I know where the will is, Señora, and you know where the money is, and I mean to have it."

His words evidently took her aback. "What imp gave you the will?"

"Never you mind, Señora; all you have to do is to give up my money."

But the Señora rushed past him suddenly, and Mark saw her no more that evening, for José Maria, with a grim chuckle, came and bade him dine alone. The Señora was indisposed.

Mark had a quiet dinner, and went to bed early. His window, as usual, stood wide open, but the moon was not yet up. Mark got into bed, and began to read, but before long, the same uncontrollable desire to look up came over him, and raising his eyes, he saw, as he expected, the beautiful pale sad face with the strange eyes, the face of the Señorita's ghost again watching him, and again it disappeared when their eyes met.

"Madelina," he called, impelled by a strong desire to speak to her—"Madelina!" She did not reappear, though he waited and waited in hopes of seeing her again. He could read no more, the book had lost its interest for him, and at last he put out the light and went to sleep.

Mark awoke with a consciousness that something was happening. He opened his eyes, and looked out through the open window. The moon had gone down now, and it was dark, very dark. But moving about outside, in the direction of the Señorita's grave, he saw for a moment the faint twinkle of a light, that suddenly came and as suddenly disappeared. He sprang out of bed and crept into the garden.

His heart was beating violently, for he felt that he was about to discover the truth concerning the injured dead. The young man had a strange Quixotic feeling, that he would like to clear the Señorita's name, to prove that the beautiful pleading face that haunted him belonged to a good and maligned woman, who had been foully done to death, and not to, as José Maria said, a devil.

As he approached the grave, he saw the moving light more clearly, but it was stationary now, standing on the ground, and he recognised it as a dark lantern. He did not go near, but, screened by some shrubs, stood quietly waiting and watching the weird scene. Mark saw it was the Señora, for though her face was hidden, the light fell full on her figure, and she was—he found to his horror—like some terrible loathsome vampire, digging up the Señorita's grave. His blood ran cold. There was the cruel murderess, not content with her

horrible work, but even after the death of her victim bent on insulting the wretched body. He could see her stooping over the place where the poor Señorita lay; stooping and digging; until he heard the thud of the spade hitting upon something which resounded to the blow. It was the coffin. Then the fiend, for woman he could not think her, bent forward triumphantly and forced open the lid with wonderfully little difficulty, looked in, and seemingly gloated over what lay there. Then she turned round, and, lifting a small black box that stood on the ground beside her, put it into the coffin. Mark saw her noiselessly clap her hands, and dance a weird and ghastly witch dance of triumph and joy round the grave. She stooped, and twirled, and twisted, and capered, like a hag distraught, waving her arms and gesticulating silently, and laughing a terrible mirthless laugh, low and almost beneath her breath. Then she quietly shut the lid and fastened it, threw a few spadefuls of earth over the coffin, and scraped it together with the spade. Her strength seemed almost superhuman as she replaced the heavy blocks of stone that covered the grave, finally smoothing the disturbed earth round the edges that no trace should be left to betray her. Mark, when he saw that she had almost finished, slipped noiselessly and quickly back to his room, and from his bed watched the twinkling light come slowly up the garden. As he expected, it approached his room, and the Señora stood quietly at the window, as if to listen. She flashed the lantern in his face, but he never blenched and lay with closed eyes, apparently sound asleep, until the old woman stole away as she had come.

But Mark could not sleep: the horrible scene haunted him; and he was puzzled to know what to do. Of two things he felt convinced; first, that Madelina had been murdered by Doña Pilar; and secondly, that the old woman had hidden the stolen money in her victim's coffin.

Suddenly, while tossing about restlessly, he heard a strange sound. Some one was moving in the house now.

Mark listened intently. What it was, he could not say, but it seemed as if some very heavy weight were being dragged along the floor. Burning with curiosity he jumped out of bed again, but just as he opened his door he heard the sound of footsteps slow and laboured, as if heavily burdened. He peeped out cautiously, and saw first the faint glimmer of light, as the Señora approached, crossing the side of the *patio* opposite to his room, and then her muffled figure with the lantern fastened to her head, in some way, while she, with both hands, dragged along what appeared to be a sack; and at the same time the house became permeated with the strange odour. Mark watched her disappear into her own room, and pull the sack inside too, but she did not shut the door. In a few minutes she slipped out again, and passed to the far *patio*. Mark followed cautiously, making no sound. The Señora disappeared into the

room next the bath-room. Then there came a noise as of something heavy being pushed along the floor, and Doña Pilar emerged with a long case which she pulled behind by means of two ropes. Mark was curious to know what it was, and felt convinced that it was some of his stolen property. He slipped back to his own room, and watched the proceedings through a chink of the door, as before. When the old lady passed, Mark saw that it was a long-shaped case with sacking fastened round the middle, but he could make out nothing more. Doña Pilar reached her own door at last, and the case being long, was awkward to pull round the corner. One end struck sharply against a small cupboard that stood in front of the Señora's door, and served as a stand for a filtering stone. She turned round and bent down, the light falling full on the case. Mark saw to his horror that it was a black coffin. He could even see the point of a white cross painted on the lid, and just showing beneath the sacking. Doña Pilar pulled it in with little difficulty, and shut and locked her door.

Mark went back to bed more puzzled and horror-stricken than ever. He felt on the eve of some even more terrible discovery, and hardly closed an eye all night. But no further sounds reached him, though he listened long and intently, and the mystery seemed very deep.

He fell asleep at last, and slept long and late, the heavy sleep that often follows a wakeful night. When he roused himself, he found to his surprise that it was nine o'clock. He got up and went out to his open-air bath, and returned refreshed and glowing. As he passed the kitchen regions old José Maria hobbled up, and said, with a sudden chuckle: "The Señora is indisposed still, Patroncito. You will not see her to-day. The devil is about," he added significantly.

Then Mark asked him what he meant.

"What will be, will be," he answered vaguely; and hurried away.

Mark took his morning *disayuno*, or breakfast of tea and bread, and soon sauntered down the garden on pretence of smoking, but really to examine the Señorita's grave. He could see the freshly-turned earth, just showing at the edges of the stone, but to the uninitiated there was not a sign to tell the tale of desecration.

Musing deeply, Mark walked up and down under the shade of the peomo trees, and listened to the ceaseless calls of the wild birds. And then, glancing up by chance, his quick eye caught sight for a moment of the pale beautiful face, set in a halo of green and feathery foliage, and, as before, watching him intently. It was the face that was in his heart continually, the face of the Señorita's ghost.

"Madelina, Madelina," he cried, holding out his arms. "What is it, tell me? For the love of heaven tell me."

The white face flushed with a look of ineffable sweetness, and vanished. Mark fancied he heard a light footstep, and thought there

was a sound of rustling leaves, but it was only imagination, for no sign of anything could he find. He searched the garden feverishly; he called quietly, but it was all in vain.

Unable to bear the inaction and suspense any longer, Mark took a horse and rode to the town again, and went to see his new friend, the bank-manager, who was a pleasant young Englishman, a little more than his own age. He still hesitated as to the advisability of taking a lawyer's advice about the matter of the money, being, to tell the truth, principally anxious to first discover for himself the secret of the Señorita's fate.

He rode back and reached the *hacienda* very late; it was already dark. He unsaddled his horse, and, as usual, groomed and fed it himself, and turned it into the corral. Then he went in.

José Maria met him. "The Señora is dead," said he shortly.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mark. "Dead? What is it? What do you mean? How terribly sudden!"

"A matter of thirteen months."

"What do you mean, José Maria?"

But the old man was chuckling and mumbling to himself childishly.

"Come in, come in and see her. She is laid out fine. She said you were to come. The devil said so."

Mark followed amazed.

José Maria threw wide open the door of the Señora's bedroom. The curtains, for it had curtains, had been drawn, and the room was very dark, except for four candles at the four corners of an open coffin that stood on trestles. The lid, with a white painted cross, lay on the ground at one side. Mark recognised it instantly.

"Go and look! Go and look!" whispered José Maria.

The young man mastered his repugnance, and drew near; at the same time repelled and attracted with a horrible attraction.

He drew back with a start.

"What! Great Heavens! That!—that!—that is not the Señora!"

For in the coffin lay a terrible, awesome, dried-up mummy-like corpse; a frightful, distorted, shrunken thing.

And then came a strangely light step, and a gentle rustling sound that made Mark look up. There, on the other side of that terrible body, stood the beautiful, swaying figure, of which, until now, he had not seen the face, the figure of the Señorita's ghost.

Mark forgot everything; forgot the horror, the dreadful corpse, the awful mystery, and undoubted crime of it all—forgot everything but that beautiful woman.

"Madelina! Madelina! for the love of heaven speak to me! Tell me who you are!"

In an instant he was beside her, and found no fading, fleeting ghostly shadow, but the warm, living presence of a glorious woman.



"Tell me, trust me! Madelina, trust me! Let me save you from this horrible life. For God's sake, trust me! I love you! Oh! my soul! I love you!"

His heart, his chivalry, his manhood, and his very soul were stirred. He would save and protect her, this beautiful and maligned creature; he would deliver her from this living death.

And then she spoke.

"Dost thou love me, Mark?"

His answer was to catch her passionately in his arms. "Come out from this awful room," he whispered wildly. "Madelina, for Heaven's sake, come out."

"Mark, I love thee. I have loved thee since thou didst first come. I have watched and watched thee. But the Señora kept me imprisoned, and said I was *dead*, Mark—dead and buried. What could I do? Thou dost know how wicked she was. How hard and cruel to thee!"

"Oh, my love, it is all over! Come away. Have no more fear, for I will protect thee."

"She hated me so, Mark. Was it not strange that she could have no pity?"

"Strange! oh, my soul, terrible! impossible! The old fiend. She was a demon."

And then a strange chuckle made Mark look round; it sounded as if it came from the coffin; but it was from José Maria.

The old man seemed moved by some intense overmastering excitement; his eyes burned and gleamed; his face worked convulsively. He pointed his withered shaking hand at Madelina, and cried in a shrill clear voice:

"Demon! liar! I will speak the truth, and save my Patroncito."

"She, she, herself is the Señora! she murdered the old patrona thirteen months ago, and kept her preserved in the room next the bath-room; it was to get the money, and she has hidden it in the Señorita's——"

But before he could say the word, Madelina, with a terrible yell of madness, had torn herself from Mark and dashed upon the old man; upsetting the coffin, and throwing down two of the candles, in her headlong rush.

"Fool! I kill you;" and before Mark could stir to save him, she had plunged a dagger into José Maria's heart.

He sank down without a sound. Then the wretched woman turned to Mark.

"Mark! Mark! believe it not! Mark, my beloved, my soul! my heart!" she held out her white hands. "Say thou dost not believe it. Mark, I can restore thee the money, I can give thee all and more. Say thou dost not believe it."

"Stand back, murderess!—stand back! I *believe* it every word."

For, as the old man was speaking, a thousand things sprang into

Mark's mind, and cried out, "It is the truth." The form, the figure, the action and voice of Madelina, the mystery of the room next the bathroom, and the horrible corpse—the whole thing seemed to be explained too clearly now. And whatever doubt might have been left in his mind, vanished, when he himself, with his own eyes, witnessed the murder of José Maria.

"Thou believest it! Thou lovest me not! Die then, fool, die!" and she dashed at him with her dagger.

But Mark was strong and well prepared. He caught her arm, and wrenched the dagger from her, flinging it far away into the *patio*, where it fell with a splash into the stagnant pool. And then ensued a frightful struggle, for the woman fought with the strength of a maniac. The white fingers clutched his throat, and it was almost more than he could do to free himself and overpower her. He dragged her out at last, and remembering that there was a storeroom next door which could be fastened firmly from the outside, managed to reach it, and thrust her in, and draw the heavy bolt.

He hurried away, leaving her beating wildly against the door, and filling the house with terrible laughter, and shrieks that made his blood run cold.

As he passed the Señora's room again he saw, by the light of the two candles that remained burning, the terrible mummy lying huddled up on the floor, half beneath the overturned coffin, and the corpse of José Maria stretched on the lid with the white painted cross that just showed beneath his poncho.

Mark hardly knew how he got to the corral and saddled his horse, but he only breathed freely when he found himself galloping at full speed along the narrow track that led to the town.

He drew rein at the bank manager's door, and dismounted more dead than alive. But he pulled himself together, and told his tale, and two hours later, the manager, the Sub-Delegado and six policemen, were galloping back with him to the scene of the murder.

As they reached the top of the hill that overlooked the *hacienda* a lurid glare lit up the sky, and the valley was filled with dense smoke. The old house was in flames.

At the gate a troop of terrified horses that had jumped out of the corral stood huddled together trembling. They were the only living things there were near the house, for the farm buildings were at some distance off.

The front part of the house was already entirely destroyed, the roof had fallen in, and nothing but the burning walls remained glowing like a red hot oven. The dead and the living were gone. Victims and murderess had alike disappeared together.

Mark staggered up against his friend. "Keep up, man; it was the best thing that could happen. She was a raving maniac."

There was nothing to be done. The murderess had taken the law into her own hands, and set fire to the house. At least, that was

Mark's supposition ; there was no other way to account for the fire, but neither he nor any one else would ever know the truth with certainty.

"And now," said the manager, "let us examine the Señorita's grave and find the money."

They set to work, raised the stone, and uncovered, not a coffin, but a large box, which contained, as was expected, a great many packets of money and valuables, and a small iron case which the manager recognised at once.

"I congratulate you," said he to Mark ; "this is your heritage !"

There was over £120,000 in bonds and hard cash, besides jewellery, silver, and many other valuables.

Mark merely shook his friend's hand ; he could not trust himself to speak. The money seemed as nothing now in his eyes. It was not worth one thousandth part of the awful experience he had just gone through. Wherever he looked, wherever he turned, he was haunted continually by the thought of that beautiful face, and of its awful secret.

He realised everything, sold the property for what it would fetch, and started for Europe as soon as it was possible for him to get away. And in the peace and quiet of an English home he does his best to forget the burning memory of those few days in the *hacienda*, and of the horrible, terrible secret of the Señorita's Ghost.

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## TRANSPLANTED.

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"FAIR, fragrant flower, from woodland mazes torn,  
Keeping sweet watch on haunted, holy ground,  
Art thou not pining, broken and forlorn,  
Within the crowded city's gloomy bound ?

"The bee falls faint whose kisses wooed thy leaves,  
The laughing breezes die that fanned thy feet ;  
The sunny glade that nursed thy beauty grieves ;  
They call to thee, 'Why hast thou left us, sweet ?'"

A perfumed whisper, floating softly through  
The city, murmurs back to woodlands gay :  
"Where tears of pity fall, there falls the dew ;  
And honest toil sheds light on darkest day."

C. E. MEETKERKE.

## IN THE LOTUS-LAND.

By CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "LETTERS FROM MAJORCA," "THE BRETONS AT HOME," ETC., ETC.



DONKEY-BOY, CAIRO.

IF, on first entering Cairo, we had been struck with its modern appearance, we soon found that there were two sides to the shield; *le revers de la médaille*; things new and old.

Modern Cairo, with its hotels, houses, and semi-palaces, surrounded by gardens in which Egyptian and European flowers mingle their perfume side by side, and the Western acacia and the Eastern palm grow together in friendly rivalry: all this is the outcome of necessity. Cairo has had to move with the times, like other

places and people who do not wish to be left behind in the race. But we soon found that many traces of ancient Cairo still remain; many a picture of Oriental life, crowded with interest, offering constant variety to the visitor, whose attention is never for a moment allowed to flag.

That Cairo should possess so much that is modern is to be regretted, but necessity has no law. The city, surrounded by its walls and innumerable gateways, had, like the river, to overflow its boundaries. Part of the walls, many of the gateways, are still there; and when the visitor turns his face towards the citadel, and passes into the more ancient quarters of the town, he may forget the modern element that lies behind him.

But grandeur and magnificence must not be expected. The streets

are narrow, the houses often small ; for in bygone days splendour and luxury were the exception, not the rule of life.

On the other hand, in quieter streets not given up to trade and traffic, there are, enclosed in unpretending gateways and behind dead walls, immense mansions where the rooms are some of them halls of vast height, fitted up with an Eastern gorgeousness dazzling to the eye, appealing to the senses. Here the master of the house does you honour. You recline upon soft divans, whilst an Arab servant, in picturesque costume, hands you coffee in small egg-like cups reposing in gold and silver filigree holders. And if, as once happened to ourselves, the host speaks no language but Arabic, the dragoman has to be brought in as interpreter.

Cairo seems to furnish every variety of Eastern life. As we have said, the numbers of costumes, the different types of face, appear endless and bewildering, until they have been classified and learned by heart. This adds immeasurably to the interest of the place. Everything then has its meaning and interpretation ; you no longer walk through streets full of riddles, mystery, and the unknown.

And yet we must not forget that Cairo, with all its age, is young in comparison with most Eastern cities. There are two distinct Caïros, separated from each other by more than two miles of roadway lying beyond the suburbs of the more modern city. Old Cairo reposes on the banks of the Nile, near the picturesque island of Roda and its venerable Nilometer.

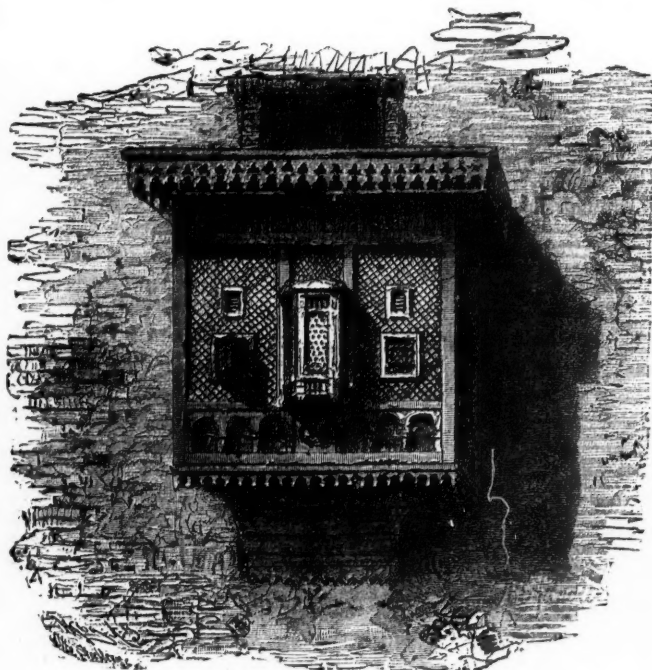
Let us turn for a moment to the more modern Cairo.

It is the largest and by far the most interesting city in Africa ; and lying in a plain between the Nile and the Mokattam Hills, its site is well chosen. Nowhere else do we find so perfect a picture of Eastern life, or realize so thoroughly the familiar scenes of the Arabian Nights. What we once looked upon as fairy-tales and tales of magic, we now behold as almost facts and realities. The very people in the classic tales, the words they uttered, the incidents that fell to them—all this seems to have come to pass. It is gazing upon life from the dead.

We turn and look for Aladdin and his famous lamp, and see lamps in abundance, any one of which might be the very one that worked the wonders. The shops and bazaars are full of ornaments which flash and glitter on all sides, and reflect surrounding scenes a thousand and a thousand-fold. A myriad glass balls flashing in all directions might be the jewels that hung on the trees in the enchanted gardens. We see fifty forms of youths with interesting faces and soft sparkling eyes, clothed in the cool Eastern dress that is full of unstudied grace. Any one of them might be Aladdin himself searching for his lamp, after the wicked merchant had become possessed of it by his cunning. A hundred old, ugly and grey-headed old Arabians might be the crafty old merchant after he had once more lost the lamp and gone back to poverty and punishment.

Many of the narrow and irregular streets seem to have been built without forethought or design. Yet they are full of interest, with their deep tones, their traces of Moorish and Saracenic architecture, their multiplicity of light and projecting windows, made of that beautifully-carved and perforated fretwork called "Mushrabeeyeh."

This, the true Saracenic art, makes a fairyland of Cairo. Nothing is more interesting, nothing more characteristic than to stand at the end of a street and gaze upon its narrowing perspective. Far down, the houses seem to meet, the windows to kiss each other. Here and



MUSHRABEEYEH WINDOW OF A HAREM.

there, at an open lattice, an Eastern lady looks out upon her limited world. Her face is provokingly veiled; for the beauty of the large, liquid, dark eye, which is visible, seems to assure us that the whole countenance, uncovered, would be a charming vision. But the barbarous Eastern laws forbid this exposure, and so in the East one of the great privileges of life—the beauty and gentle influence of woman—is wanting.

Of what is she thinking, this veiled lady at the half-open lattice? Is she wondering how it fares with her sisters in colder climes? Does she know of the liberty they possess? That, instead of going about



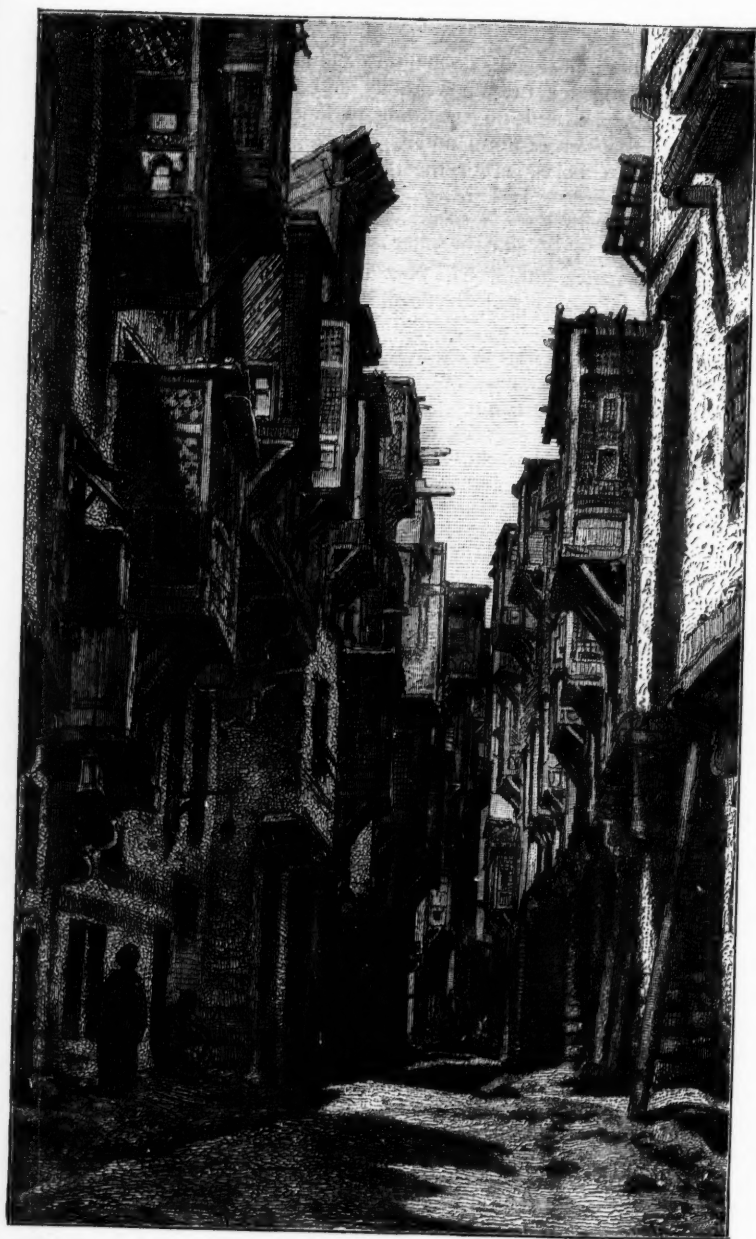
with veiled faces, or being shut up in harems, they are the equals of their lords, have all honour done unto them as unto the weaker vessel? Does she long for the same liberty and privileges? Would she be free to come and go according to fancy—to throw aside for ever these shackles of form and face, these destroyers of grace and movement—to boldly scour the desert, see distant shores, breathe the free air of foreign lands?

How is it with these women of Egypt? Do they rebel against their condition, which must rob life of all its sweetness and grace, and make it a penance rather than what it was intended to be—a source of delight, of praise and thanksgiving for life and breath and all things good and pure and beautiful? We never saw a veiled face at a window, or a woman walking the streets with all this Eastern disguise and encumbrance, but we longed to ask her a multitude of questions—discover whether she was happy and contented, looked upon herself as a part of heaven's divine creation, reserved for contentment in this world, happiness in the next: or thought of herself as a mere animated machine, in which ideas and impulse and aspiration must be stifled, and life can be only tolerated.

No doubt they have their compensations. There is sympathy in numbers; the Eastern woman sees that all her sisters are treated alike; she is neither better nor worse off than they. The back is generally fitted to the burden, and habit becomes second nature. So the daily round goes on. The days and the years pass; and for twelve centuries the women of Egypt have borne their captivity.

If the street with its narrowing perspective, down which you are gazing, is a quiet one, probably one or two Eastern figures will stand out characteristically: a woman on foot, covered with the habara or black mantle and hood, looking as if she were on her way to some house of mourning, or to join in some funeral procession; though blue, and not black, is the sorrowing garb in Egypt. Or a man mounted on a donkey is wayfaring at a dignified and leisurely pace—the men's dress is as imposing and graceful as the women's is the opposite—though the bright, sure-footed little donkeys can trot briskly enough, and will go on for hours with untiring energy.

The soft-eyed houri, from behind her mushrabeeyeh window, looks after the retreating Arab, whose silken garment declares him to be of her own rank in life, whilst his green turban announces a descendant of the Prophet; and she gives a sigh to her own incarceration, and like all daughters of Eve—and sons of Adam, for that matter—longs for the forbidden. It is impossible but that she draws a comparison between the inequalities of the sexes; but here there must be no rising in rebellion. They have to accept life as they find it, and there can be no thought of change. It would be well if those ladies of England who agitate for "women's rights"—which is only another term for men's rights—could be transported for a time



STREET IN CAIRO.

to the East and take the place of their subdued sisters. They would return with improved views of their own happier lot.

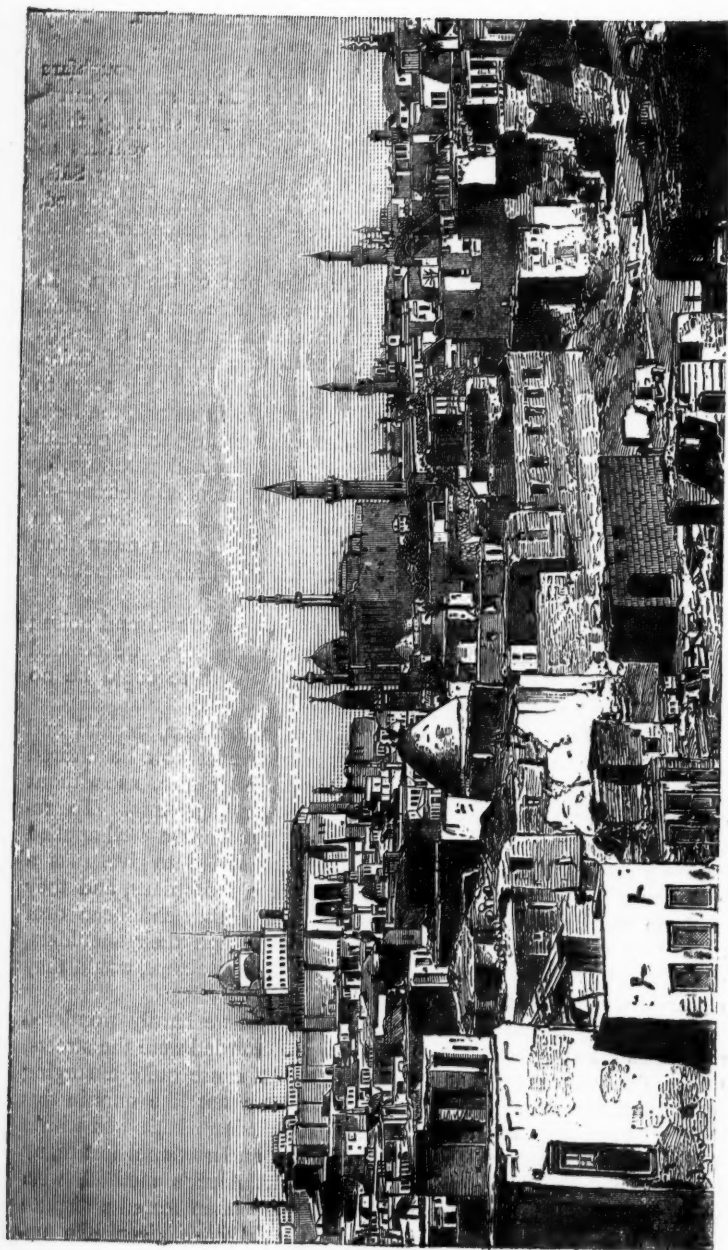
We pass up the quiet street, and turn into a wider thoroughfare just in time to see a dashing equipage, with its Sâis or runners carrying wands, keeping well in front of the horses, and shouting their warnings for all foot passengers, donkeys, and humbler vehicles to make way. Fast as the horses gallop, the strong, fleet young Sâis, trained to the work, are always ahead. They are lightly clothed, generally barefooted, and their free and well-formed limbs are fleet as the deer.

But Oriental life is best seen in the older part of the town. In the new suburbs, where the thoroughfares are wide and wholesome, and you breathe pure air, few ever venture except from necessity. Even the public gardens are seldom visited by the populace of Cairo. They keep to their close and crowded quarters, in which they seem to delight, asking for nothing better. The beautiful in nature, the form and colour and perfume of flowers, the trees raising their graceful heads and casting long shadows across the chequered pathways, or bending to the evening breeze, the song and flight of the birds—all these they look upon as unfamiliar objects, outside their lives, with which they are not in harmony. Nothing surprised us more than the comparative neglect of these public gardens, where we sometimes wandered in solitude.

The more ancient streets are bewildering in their crowd and noise; and often, as we trotted through them on donkeys, we seemed confronted by an animated wall, beyond which there could be no passing.

Then our dragoman with his powers of persuasion, mental and physical, would take the lead, and it was wonderful how he cleared a passage. Many a hard word was sent after him, as without ceremony he rode roughshod over a slow-moving Arab. To remonstrance he was supremely indifferent; or perhaps a well applied cut from his whip was all the notice he condescended to give. As a rule, you might shout yourself hoarse to these pedestrians, and they paid no more attention to the warning than if they had been deaf as adders. Only when the whip came down upon their shoulders, or the ass, roughly urged forward, overturned their balance, would they move out of the way in self-defence.

It was certainly very often exasperating, and we hardly wondered at Aleck's resorting to strong measures. So crowded were the streets, that a donkey passing quickly up would often cause quite a surging amongst the people. All the dragomans were not like ours in this respect; they were sons of peace and submission; kept well within all rules; never attempted any self-assertion; and no doubt lost many an opportunity to those they piloted. Yet Aleck's method, with any one else, might have been a failure. We often feared a dispute—at the very first sign of which we should have given him up.



CAIRO.

But his daring, coolness, commanding attitude, "as if to the manner born," carried him through everything.

"I learned to obey in the English army, sir," he was fond of saying; "now I make these wretched Egyptians obey me. They are a miserable set, always wanting backsheesh, never satisfied. I give them as little as I can."

And to do Aleck justice, he made a small coin go a very long way. Most of the other dragomans distributed backsheesh with a largesse worthy of a royal hand. At the end of the day, their own day's pay was a ridiculously small item in comparison with the fees lavishly bestowed right and left.

But if the streets are narrow, the byways are often so much more so, that two donkeys meeting will pause and stare, and wonder which must politely back into a friendly doorway. The mushrabeeyeh windows are so close to each other that it is often easy to pass from house to house without troubling the front doors.

The main streets resound with cries; movement and colour dazzle the eye; all the tints of the rainbow seem to have suddenly become detached and animated. Wherever you look there is a flashing of life and motion. Many-coloured turbans resemble a garden in which the flowers are performing a Dervish dance. The dark blue dresses of the Copts stand out in contrast with the yellow of the Jews. Not less distinctive are the different types of feature.

Here and there amongst them a woman is making her way, dressed in dark blue or black, silver or copper ornaments gleaming upon her wrists and ankles; the face, as ever, carefully veiled. Her hands, if visible, are generally stained with henna, a brownish yellow tint, looked upon as a great beauty. Many of the humbler women are tattooed, but in the streets all this is hidden by their disguise. They walk as if they had an object in life; and this is more than can be said of the men, who go about their work as if for them the sun never set, and life was nothing but a pastime. The women of the upper classes are graceful and well-made, but from their out-door costume this would never be suspected.

As we make way, the crowd does not diminish. There are cries on all sides. Many a merchant is standing at his shop door surveying the scene. As we have said, it is the Arabian Nights over again. Everything is full of interest and magic. At many a street corner, sitting on a stool, with a tray on a stand before him, a money-changer may be seen. He looks sharp and wide-awake, as if searching for prey. His eyes glitter like a falcon's; his long fingers have taken a chronic clutching attitude from the habit of gathering up gold and silver and handling paper money. All is fish that comes to his net, and he will take heavy toll in the way of exchange unless you are well up in the coin of the country. He generally speaks sufficient English to bewilder you, so that for the moment you almost forget that two and two make four.

Open to the streets, we notice here and there, as we pass through the crowd, the schools in which the young Arabs are given their limited education.

The schoolmaster is called a *fikeh*, and pursues the ordinary system with his pupils; whilst they, mischievously inclined, give him as much trouble as possible. His voice is often raised in anger, and now and then his hand administers a well-applied reproof. Human nature is the same everywhere in its broad outlines: and Solomon's advice seems to hold good in all countries. You may watch the proceedings for a few minutes; but if, at last, you attract the *fikeh's* attention, he will manifest displeasure, even threaten to treat you with as little ceremony as one of his own boys. His hand looks formidable, and discretion being the better part of valour, you move on.

These schools are never large, but they are numerous. Why they are so public it is difficult to say. The boys' attention often distracted makes order more difficult to keep.

The process of education is amusing to watch. Their chief task is learning the Koran, and as the boys recite verse after verse, they sway their body to and fro, as if, by and by, they meant to qualify for dervishes. Many of the little faces have bright black eyes brimming over with fun, and intelligent expressions.

A school is also attached to most of the public fountains. The teaching is chiefly religious. As we have said, the great end and aim is for the boys to learn the Koran by heart, so that later on they may be able to repeat it over and over again. The mere repetition is considered meritorious, and forms an act of devotion. Like the Roman Catholics, the Mohammedans have their rosary; a *châplet* provided with ninety beads, for the ninety prayers containing, each prayer, one of the ninety-nine names of Allah. That the boys are able to learn so much by heart speaks well for their memory; for a great deal of the Koran is obscure and unintelligible, and nothing is explained to them—probably because the schoolmasters understand very little more about the matter than themselves.

Many of the sheykhs and patriarchs are of the highest order of intelligence, but the ordinary instructors are often less gifted. When a boy has learned the whole of the Koran, his education is supposed to be finished. A great family gathering then takes place, at which the schoolmaster is chief guest. He has often gained the honour after much labour and anguish of spirit, and nervous wear and tear, and forcible persuasion. We have seen that there is no royal road to learning.

These public fountains are reservoirs, filled with Nile water brought up on the backs of camels. They are numerous, and supply the people gratuitously with water. Generally they are handsome erections, ornamented with columns and surrounded with iron railings. The fountain consists of two storeys, and in the upper storey is held the school, where the children are taught a little reading, writing, and arithmetic, in addition to the Koran.



Fountains and schools are the result of endowment by pious people in days gone by.

In many a doorway may be seen the curious, somewhat patient and resigned face of the seller of date-bread, a preparation not very tempting to look at. He too sits on a low stool, with a great round



WATER-SELLER.

brazier before him supporting a large round tray, where the curious stuff is baking. Half his time is spent in using a willow whisk to keep the flies from attacking his store and diminishing his profits. Luckily, there is a great demand for his date-bread. Not only are grown-up men and women his customers, but the donkey and other

street boys go in for it ; just as our street boys in England patronize the apple and pear barrows, and those delectable street ices which to them seem more delicious than nectar and ambrosia.

Many of these people ply their trades in the open air, and having no rent to pay, manage to exist upon what would be starvation to an Englishman in the same rank of life. So little is needed in this climate to keep body and soul together.

Conspicuous in the crowd are the water-carriers. These perhaps work harder than any others for a livelihood and are the worst paid. This seller of water looks a curious figure, as he wearily perambulates the streets with his heavy load ; a strange-looking, inflated goatskin, slung across his back. He often also carries a porous bottle, called a kulleh, in his hand, with which he offers a draught to the passer-by.

For two-thirds of the year he has to fetch the water from the distant banks of the Nile ; but during the months of overflow he can draw it from the canal which runs through the city. In return for the draught some give him the smallest possible coin, whilst others give him only their blessing. There are sellers of other refreshing drinks, such as sherbet, and a sweet decoction prepared from dates and other fruits.

Others, again, sell the various sweetmeats peculiar to the East, of which starch is generally the foundation. These they will exchange for old clothes, or anything else capable of being turned into money.

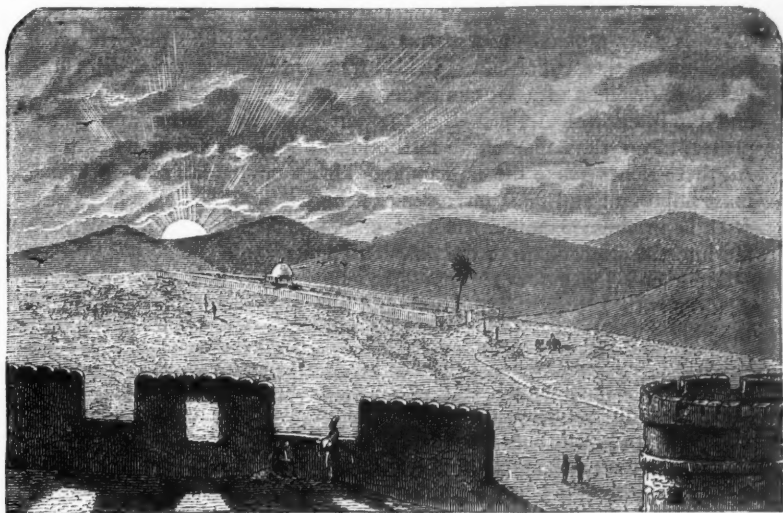
Few of the poor cook at home, buying their food ready prepared from these wandering merchants : unsavoury-looking jellies, fish and meat pies or puddings, and so forth, of which the aroma alone ought to satisfy an ordinary appetite. Their purchase made, they squat down cross-legged in the street, or a friendly doorway, and devour their food with great relish. There is no ceremony here, no lingering in conversation or exchanging of courtesies. It is said that thirty thousand of these cooks walk the streets of Cairo, or preside at stalls, thus providing for the wants of the ordinary population. They visit all the highways and byways, the courts and alleys, and mingle their cries with the cries of the water-sellers and a hundred other sellers, until the air seems as full of sound as it is of colouring.

Fruit and vegetables, the sweet but unpleasant sugar-cane, prepared maize, form no small part of the seller's stock in trade. The fruit stalls are certainly the least objectionable and the most tempting. Lupins grow in great abundance and are very popular. They are called "children of the river," because they have to be soaked in Nile water for some time before they are ready for use. Nearly all fruits and vegetables are found in their season. Of dates there are said to be twenty-seven kinds. Brandy is made from them ; and in the oases of the desert a certain wine is sometimes made from the heart of the palm, which grows in the crown of the tree : expensive and cruel luxury, for the tree, robbed of its heart, dies ; the

opposite to man, whose heart, the poets tell us, "may break, but brokenly live on."

The date palm blossoms in March and April, the fruit ripens in August and September. The vines also blossom in March and April, the fruit being ready for use in June and July. Women often preside at the stalls, but of course veiled.

All these itinerant merchants help to fill the streets with a noisy, restless, animated crowd. The camel-drivers are much in evidence. You suddenly look up from something that has been attracting your attention, and close to your face are startled to see a curious, patient, passive animal quietly making its way as if blind and deaf to surrounding scenes. There is a sad look in its eyes, as



GRAVE OF EVE: JEDDAH.

if it were for ever protesting against Nature for having given it a hump. Apparently of all creatures it is the least inquisitive. It is the most useful of Eastern animals, the least exacting. The camel will go for three days without water; and a little maize, or desert grass, or prickly acacia leaves will supply all its needs in the way of food.

Many of those amongst the crowd are strangers or men of business who have come to Cairo with some definite object in view; and this accomplished, they depart again.

Caravanserais, those great travelling institutions of the East, are for ever arriving from all parts of Africa and Arabia. They have patiently plodded across the desert, their faithful camels bearing heavy loads without a protest. Daily before sunset the whole company has offered up its prayers, adding to the usual formula a

petition for a safe arrival. Night after night, the tents have been pitched under the clear Eastern skies, the stars shining down upon them with a serene benediction. Perhaps they have come from distant Jeddah, on the borders of the Red Sea, having made before starting a pilgrimage to Eve's Tomb outside the walls of the flourishing town, where Eve is supposed to have been buried. A domed chapel is built over the tomb, which can only be seen through a hole in the pavement. Of Adam's tomb no mention is made; according to Eastern tradition our first parents do not repose together.

This Caravanserai, coming from Jeddah, is probably laden with the riches of the Turkish Empire. The camels bear precious burdens, and are well guarded by day, carefully watched by night. Pearls they carry in large numbers, and black coral, coffee of the choicest kind, balsam and senna leaves for the druggist, horses and donkeys. To this they probably add carpets, woollen and silk stuffs, spices, cocoa-nuts and essential oils. Jeddah trades in all these articles, for it has large dealings with Mozambique, Persia, India, the Malay Islands, and the interior of Arabia. They import corn, rice, butter, and oil: possess also a slave market, an institution no longer existing in Cairo. All these riches make the bazaars and khans of Jeddah some of the most important and most interesting of the East.

It is in these same bazaars that one expects most particularly to fall into the atmosphere of the Arabian Nights.

Here one looks for Haroun Alraschid and Abou Hassan, for Aladdin with his wonderful lamp, and the old Jew pedlar with his brand-new articles for temptation and exchange. If we do not find them, we find others exactly like them. The same people, the same stories and events might still be in existence; the same delightful life passed in a magic dream, a rainbow atmosphere, roses more numerous and beautiful than those of the Vale of Cashmere.

Passing under the great archway leading into the bazaars, we find ourselves surrounded by a curious crowd.

First comes the proud Bedouin, holding his head erect and walking as if the world belonged to him—as it does in the sense of roving and freedom; for the wide wilderness is his, and north, south, east, or west, he may pitch his tent as he likes. He is the true Bohemian, the child of the desert; the sandy waste is his cradle, the dark skies of heaven are his covering. Near him we note the sad-looking Copt, upon whose face there is still the inherited traces of past slavery and persecution; days when, centuries ago, oppression had to be borne without the hope of revenge, with no chance of a deliverer. No Moses arose for them, as for the children of Israel.

Next comes the Jew, with his impenetrable countenance, firmness of purpose, strength of will; the expression of the eye betraying a greed of gain; his chief object in life the heaping up riches, though he cannot tell who shall gather them.

Talking to him energetically, stands a Greek, who takes care that

he shall not be passed over. He is lithe of limb, bright and active, with clearly-cut features and eyes that never seem to slumber. The slow, deliberate movements of the true Oriental are out of touch with him. If he only had the fervency of the Mohammedan, the large brain and strength of purpose of the Jew, he might be first and foremost in the race. But he is rather of the butterfly species ; a rolling stone that gathers little moss.

All tribes, including every type of negro, are here ; all colours and complexions. Having grown familiar with their traits and costumes, we know them all ; each as distinct and evident as if ticketed with his place and nation. We have said how wonderfully it adds to the interest of the scene, and to its comprehension. You feel almost at home with them ; know almost as much about them as they know of themselves ; and of their pedigree and ancient history probably a little more.

The bazaars are undoubtedly interesting as an Oriental institution ; but they are as certainly disappointing at a first glance. We enter them full of the influence of the *Arabian Nights* : pages read and re-read, until at last everything is seen through their medium. Imagination has conjured up something very like Fairyland ; we expect we know not what. Unformed visions of gorgeous magnificence, of Eastern charm and beauty, are floating through the mind : but reality falls very far short of this fanciful picture.

Cairo possesses two chief bazaars and a great number of small ones. Some of them date as far back as the thirteenth century, and the Khân-Khalil stands on the site once consecrated to the tombs of the Caliphs—those Arab sovereigns of Egypt who reigned before the days of the Mamelukes. What they were in those days none can tell.

In these, our exalted visions fall to the ground as we observe that they are little more than long streets or rows of very ordinary stalls—thoroughfares so narrow that they soon become crowded ; whilst overhead many a tarpaulin keeps out the sun, and a semi-obscurity often reigns. The thoroughfares are uneven and badly-paved—like many of the streets of Cairo. On each side the goods are displayed on stalls or in booths, each presided over by a dark-eyed Oriental. He has a great eye to a bargain, and asks an Englishman just twice the amount he is generally willing to take. If he thinks he has secured a good customer, he will produce coffee, served in small delicate cups very much like an egg-shell cut in two, reposing in gold or silver filigree stands, or stands of fine brass-work. The cups hold very little, but the coffee is strong and excellent. It is made in true Oriental fashion, and the grounds are stirred up and taken with it, a creamy frothy beverage, without milk and often without sugar. The coffee is less finely ground than with us, and forms a less unpleasant sediment.

Behind the front stall is generally a large square room filled with

goods, where the merchant will open out before you the treasures of the East, according to his line. Rich brocades, embroideries cunningly and wonderfully worked, silks and muslins ; every species of fine damask and gold and silver cloth ; ancient trappings of gold and crimson sheen, wrought handwork, with long gold and crimson tassels that must once have graced a royal *cortège* with wonderful effect. Many of these articles are not Arabian or Egyptian, but Persian and Indian. And some are new, and some are centuries old.



ENTRANCE TO BATH FOR WOMEN : CAIRO.

Perhaps the next stall to these rich cloths and brocades is one of precious stones. Small piles of the red ruby, the blue amethyst, the white and yellow diamond, the pink topaz, send forth a thousand flashing rainbow hues as a sunbeam pierces a cunning hole in the tarpaulin and falls upon the table. But beware how you purchase the stones, or you may regret your bargain.

Stalls of gold and silver work are frequent. The Egyptian and Arabian women as much as their Western sisters love ornaments of



every kind and load themselves with them; from the glittering spangles that decorate the *rabtah*, or front part of the head-dress, to the anklets worn just above the foot: thus armed *cap-à-pied* with so-called charms. Some are more conspicuous than ornamental, such as the ring the women of certain tribes wear through the nose, luckily few and far between. One of the bazaars is given up entirely to this work. In every booth you may see a cross-legged merchant working at his beautiful art. It is generally sold by weight, and a small profit will content him for his time and labour.

Another small bazaar is given up to the shoemakers, and the visit is neither romantic nor interesting. The manufacture of slippers is an important item in their commerce. They are constantly used by every one. At every mosque-door are many pairs: and they soon wear out.

In the most fragrant of the bazaars the spices are sold: those beautiful and pungent Arabian spices, which scent the air with delicious and subtle perfume. You have only to close your eyes, to fancy yourself wandering in groves of cinnamon or under the shady branches of the scented cedar. In the next bazaar you pause before a stall where the rich attar of roses brings to your imagination all the charms of that Bower of roses that stood by Bendemeer's stream, where, we are told, the nightingale sang all the day long. Here the nightingale is silent, but the scent of the roses is never absent. The well-known empty bottles are lying in numbers before you. If you buy one, the merchant takes it up, weighs it, then fills it with the luscious perfume, which filters in drop by drop. It is sold strictly by measure, and is worth almost its weight in gold.

Perhaps the most interesting of all the stalls and shops in or out of the bazaars, are those filled with the mushrabeeyeh work of the country; with Oriental lanterns fitted with rich ruby glass, which casts a brilliant though subdued reflection when lighted; with daggers, old and modern, enclosed in magnificent silver sheaths. From the number of ancient daggers sold year after year, the world at one time must have been generally occupied in making them. Many have a romantic history attached to them, as ingeniously put together as anything to be found in the *Arabian Nights*—and as apocryphal.

In these shops you find yourself in the true Oriental atmosphere. In some, such as that kept by Purvis, near the entrance to the Mooskee, you may wander from room to room, amazed and enchanted. Here again is fairyland. All the manufactured wonders of the East are before you, of the best and most costly description.

Especially we remember a mother-of-pearl coffer, more beautiful than anything we had ever seen of its kind; full of subtle rainbow colours that changed and glowed like the hidden fires of an opal; of a refined and exquisite tone that nothing but extreme age could have given. No price would tempt the owner to part with it at that time. It was centuries old, and not to be replaced, he declared. Opening

it, he displayed rich and antique brocades, cunningly wrought in days gone by—treasures worthy of the shrine. When we first saw it,



EMBROIDERERS: BAZAARS OF CAIRO.

we stood in wondering admiration. This, we said, must have once belonged to Aladdin's palace, and was made by magicians; no ordinary human fingers could have wrought it.

"Nay," returned Purvis, "he could not admit that. For if it had been made by magic, by magic it might one day disappear. These," he continued, spreading out his gold and silver brocades, his ancient silken embroideries, "you may have; but the coffer is one of my treasures. I bought it years ago, and should hardly know my place without it. The time will come, no doubt, when I shall be willing to let it go: the time comes for everything," he added, philosophically. "I will promise you the refusal of it, if you like."

He had a rule that his fellow-merchants would do well to imitate: not a fraction from the price first asked would he abate. If others in Cairo did the same, they would find it very much to their advantage in the end.

We had been spending an immense time one morning in this enchanted palace, when our dragoman, probably tired of waiting, appeared on the scene and awoke us from the dream in which we were lost. Had we taken coffee, we should have said it had worked some charm upon us; but we had taken nothing. In an exquisite filigree incense-burner Purvis had certainly lighted a pastille which sent forth an aroma deliciously intoxicating, steeping mind and fancy in a golden atmosphere; but it was atmosphere and imagination only. We were in an enchanted palace, and wanted no return to real life. Aleck, however, thought differently. We must be buying up half the shop at fabulous prices; it was time he interfered. In reality we had bought nothing. We had been feasting upon wonders. The desire for possession had not yet reached us. But for Aleck to think was to act; indecision formed no part of his character. It was never more apparent than when he confided to us his matrimonial troubles.

"Are you married, Aleck?" we had asked him one morning. His countenance clouded over.

"Indeed I am, sir," he replied; "two wives."

"Isn't that one too many?" we asked. "In England we are allowed only one wife, and even one is sometimes hard to manage. I don't know what the consequences of two would be."

"Every country makes its own laws," returned Aleck, pompously, as if quoting a proverb. "In England you may only have one wife; here we may have four. If I had four I should sacrifice myself to the Nile; they might fight it out together. I can manage pretty well everything in the world, but the Prophet himself could not manage women: that is well known: and so when one got too much for him, he simply divorced her. They are more stubborn than camels fiercer than eagles, louder than jackals, uncertain as the wind. When I go home, if I am pleasant with one, the other would scratch my eyes out; it is nothing but noise, quarrelling and contention. On the other hand, if I scold one, both make common cause against me, and you would think that I was a perfect demon. But," he added, a fixed determination coming into his face, "I will stand it no



A SARRÂF, OR MONEY-CHANGER.

longer. I was thinking about it this morning, and made up my mind. As soon as I go back home this time, I shall divorce one of them and send her back to her mother. We can do that, you know, sir; it is a capital law, and works well. Most of them are kept in a good temper by it. It is only the shrews, with tempers stronger than they are, who throw prudence to the wind."

"What made you marry her?" we asked; wondering what sort of wooing and winning these people were allowed. Many a bridegroom never sees his wife until after the marriage ceremony is over. A rude awakening must often be the result—followed by a speedy divorce. In Aleck's rank, however, they are less restricted, and meet more freely.

"She was pretty," replied our dragoman ruefully, "and she took care to keep her temper out of sight. We had often met, and she seemed very fond of me. So one day when the stars were against me, I married her. Ever since then she has led me a life."

All this was delivered so rapidly that many a sentence had to be guessed at or interpreted by the context. But the look of determination was not to be mistaken. Aleck had made up his mind, and the wife's fate was doomed. It was his short and satisfactory way of taming the shrew. Even Achilles had his vulnerable point, and here was our dragoman's. He could manage the people about him, gain his end where others failed—he could not rule his women-folk.

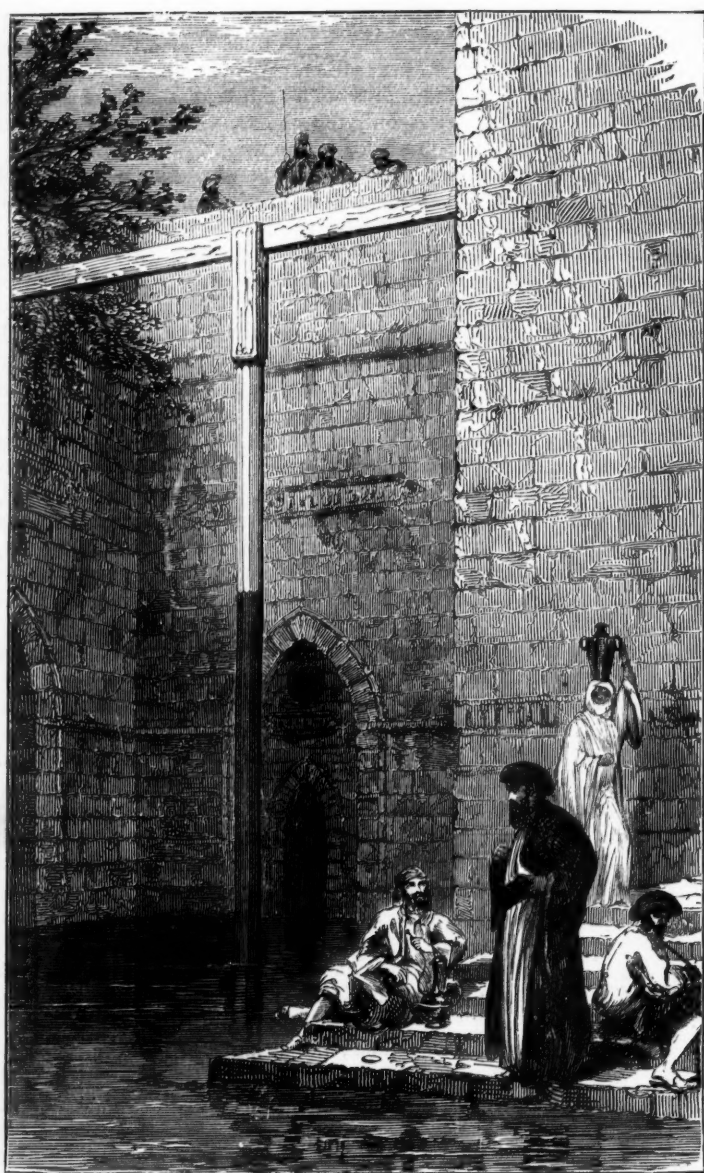
But this is a digression from Purvis's, where the sudden appearance of our dragoman awoke us from our Eastern glamour.

Aleck looked disturbed. It is true we were his masters for the time being, but that only meant that he was to have the privilege of doing as he liked, and of giving us suggestions which, like royal commands, were not open to refusal.

For some time he had amused himself outside Purvis's; wandering about the small market, visiting the fruit stalls and helping himself here and there to a particularly fine specimen with a condescension which made the act a favour to the stall-holder; gossiping with his numerous friends, who were as plentiful as dates in autumn; bestowing a cut of his whip upon a luckless beggar in return for the blessing which accompanied the demand for charity—a response which generally checked the blessing half way, and turned it into something very different.

All this was very well for a time; but at last, when all the stalls had been visited, all the people interviewed, and all the news exchanged, it occurred to Aleck that he was being neglected. This was an unpardonable sin in his eyes.

We had taken donkeys that morning for a very different purpose than to keep them waiting outside Purvis's: no less a purpose than a ride into the desert to hunt for fossils, visit the petrified forest and watch the shadows lengthening from the distant pyramids. The visit



NILOMETER: ISLAND OF RODA.



to Purvis's had been an impromptu affair, arising out of a remark from H. at the moment we were passing the archway leading through the small market to his place. On the impulse of the moment we had turned in, leaving Aleck, the donkeys, and the donkey-boys to amuse themselves outside. Not that Aleck would have scrupled to follow us, making the round of everything, and listening to all that was said; taking mental observations to crop up afterwards in the form of advice. He had remained outside this morning of his own free will, and for his own special pleasure. So when it pleased him, he did not hesitate to enter with his protest.

"Please, sir," said he, "the donkeys outside are eating their heads off. We have lost our morning. It is too late now to go to the desert."

And then he threw a reproachful look upon his surroundings, as if wondering whether we had bought up the whole collection, or had left a few bagatelles for others who should come after.

"Are the donkeys at the door, Aleck?"

"Yes, sir. Great day for the donkey boys. They say all pay and no work. Donkeys gone to sleep. Idle boys in mischief."

"What is to be done now?" we inquired, consulting a large clock just in front of the wonderful old mother-of-pearl coffer. Time had flown on wings in this enchanted palace. Purvis himself seemed to delight in taking us round—apparently indifferent whether purchases were made or not; satisfied if only his handicraft was admired—for all the exquisite mushrabeeyeh work, the magnificent cabinets and sideboards, chairs, tables, wonderful screens, and a hundred other objects, were made upon the premises, under his very eye. He had clever designers always about him, the most skilled workmen of Egypt.

"I don't know, sir," replied Aleck. "I think the best thing will be to give the donkeys a little exercise, and the boys too; a good sharp trot down to Roda Island and the Nilometer, right through Old Cairo. We could do it well, and be back by lunch-time."

So we thanked Mr. Purvis for his attention, promising a speedy return when there were no donkeys to be kept waiting, and no tyrant dragoman to be obeyed; and departed. We mounted our animals and away we went, Aleck triumphantly leading the van. You might have thought the whole of Cairo belonged to him.

Every one in Cairo mounts donkeys, and therefore no one looks conspicuous. On the first occasion, one feels uncomfortable and out of place. In front of you is, perhaps, a huge specimen of humanity, six foot four, plodding along on his patient animal, his feet almost touching the ground, his head half-way to the clouds. Beside him rides his ministering angel, more than making up in breadth what is wanting in height. Her flopping hat keeps rhythm to the donkey's step, beating time like a metronome. They look a ridiculous couple, and you wonder if you look equally absurd. But you have no flopping lady to escort, looking like an old-fashioned man-of-war



ISLAND OF RODA.

under full canvas; and Nature has not gifted you with sixty inches of waist measurement, or seventy-six of height. The uncomfortable feeling wears off; you soon find yourself at home on donkey-back; and when you grow used to the action, it is not unpleasant.

We went trotting down the streets of Cairo, Aleck scattering people right and left, indifferent to human life. Passing out of the town, Old Cairo lay in front of us: we were soon within its ancient, rather woe-begone, though interesting thoroughfares. On reaching the ancient Mosque of Amrou, our dragoman, having had enough of interiors for one day, pretended that it was closed. The old port was full of interest and animation, with its picturesque boats and busy crowd. Here the Nile opens up majestically, and you may trace its course for a great distance. Opposite we noted Gizeh with its Pyramids and small palm-woods of great beauty. Ferries, darting to and fro, conveyed passengers and animals from bank to bank; donkeys and camels in friendly contact with each other; the one small and light of foot and easy to manage; the other heavy, clumsy, evidently ill at ease upon the water, sacred Nile though that water was.

A ferry-boat quickly took us across to the island of Roda, which occupies the centre of the river in front of Old Cairo: an island still green and flourishing, though its best days are over. Here palm-trees yet grow and flowers are gorgeous and abundant. It was once famous for its beautiful gardens, but these have for the most part fallen into neglect. It now owes much to its natural fertility.

Roda is chiefly esteemed because it contains the Nilometer, which has stood there since the beginning of the ninth century. A winding and intricate sort of maze, conducted us after a time to a closed gate, at which Aleck knocked—for a time in vain. At last a woman appeared, and with slow and deliberate manner opened to us. Aleck of course remonstrated, and the woman replied that not she but the gardener was doorkeeper. The latter, however, had gone off to be married—or divorced; she couldn't remember which, and one was as bad as the other; for if the men got divorced it was only to marry other wives. She herself was still an unappropriated blessing, and her mind had probably revolted against the sex that would none of her charms. Her face was uncovered—perhaps the island made its own laws and sensibly gave its women their freedom—and certainly her beauty led one to suppose that she would remain unappropriated to the end.

The garden was charming and productive. Lovely fruit trees were evidently much more in favour with the absent gardener than the lady who was his *locum tenens*. Exquisite flowers enlivened the beds and sent forth a delicious perfume. Many a palm-tree threw its shadow across the white dazzling paths. Tradition says that here Moses was found by Pharaoh's daughter—it is probably only tradition—

and on the opposite bank of the river there is a tree bearing Moses' name.

Amidst all this wealth of Nature, stood the Nilometer. Here for more than a thousand years the rising of the Nile has been anxiously watched. Upon this depended the prosperity of the country: so much so that until it reached a certain height the people were free of taxes, as already stated. The measuring was in the hands of the Sheykhs, who for long years gave out false reports.

A square chamber contains the measuring-rod, and the Nile water reaches it by means of underground canals. Niches and Gothic arches resting upon columns ornament the walls. A wide stone staircase leads to the water, where men and women may fill their pitchers and flirt, gossip, or moralize, according to their mood. Numerous inscriptions are visible.

In the centre of the water rises the column or measuring rod that has been in use for centuries. It is octagonal, and once bore many inscriptions which have been worn or washed away. The measurement was kept under the control of the Sheykhs, and is so to this day; but these in their turn are now surveyed by the police. Then, as now, the tillers of the soil were not allowed to approach it. When the waters reach a certain mark, the good news is proclaimed; the banks are cut; the waters spread over the country. An image in the form of a woman, made of mud, gaudily decorated, is then with much ceremony thrown into the Nile as a propitiatory offering. In days gone by a living woman and not an image was sacrificed, but happily that is all over.

We gazed with strange interest upon this relic of the past, which means so much for the Egyptians. Year by year, century after century, this measurement has been watched with an anxiety which meant life or death, famine or abundance, to multitudes, telling inch by inch the rising or falling of the waters from their invisible source. The effect of the inundation begins to be felt about the month of June; this generally continues until September, when the waters commence to subside. The mud deposited dries up in January, and upon this depends the fertility of Egypt.

For the moment our surroundings were beautiful and romantic. With all its flowers and fruit trees, there was a certain air of wildness about the garden of the Nilometer. At a little distance, on rising ground, was the small palace to which the garden belonged. At our feet flowed the classic and venerable stream. A barge filled with hay was passing upwards, one of those Nile boats that with sail set are so full of beauty and charm, and outlined against the clear sky form so complete a picture. Not far off, a gorgeous and royal Dahabeeyah was moored near the palace of Ibrahim Pacha.

Before us, along the banks of the canal, stretched the houses of Old Cairo—grey, flat-roofed tenements, that had long been strangers to wealth and prosperity. We caught a glimpse of a street running

at right angles with the river. Many a refuse heap lay about, from which even the lynx-eyed old chiffoniers of Paris would have found it difficult to extract the smallest treasure. A woman from the top of a house was hauling up, by means of a basket and a long rope, a load of vegetables that she had just bought from one of the street merchants, whose name—as we have seen—is legion. Down the grey banks of the Nile women were passing with their water-pitchers; women of free and graceful bearing in spite of their poverty and humble birth. As they walked away with their artistically-shaped jars upon their head, they might have been descendants of some Eastern queen. A ferry-boat shot across the stream, making directly for the foot of our water temple. It was the truant gardener, and a veiled lady accompanied him. “Evidently marriage and not divorce was the reason of his absence,” said H., when Aleck had duly informed us of the illustrious approach. “I thought a wedding was accompanied by all sorts of ceremonies and festivities.”

“Not always, sir,” returned our dragoman. “It depends on the rank of the people. With some, too, like the gardener here, it is an every day affair. He divorces a wife about once a year, and marries another. I know him well.”

The boat stopped within a few yards of us, and the bridegroom helped the bride to disembark as if he had been another Antony, she another Cleopatra. Of her face we saw little, and her form was not sylph-like, but this might be due to a superabundance of clothing. They marched up the pathway together, the gardener stopping a moment to exchange greetings with Aleck. Then he went on and both disappeared within the house.

We took the boat back to the shore, sorry to leave the pleasant little island. But time and tide wait for no man. The donkeys had had another rest; a long trot was before us.

Once more we mounted, and Aleck led the van. Once more his voice made itself heard, his whip flourished right and left. Out of Old Cairo into the long dusty road, where we caught glimpses of lovely gardens, and barren stretches of land, and the windings of the river; modern Cairo, with its tombs and temples, rising in front of us like an oasis out of a desert. And ever above and before us, in the far distance, was the everlasting rock, crowned with its ancient citadel; whilst the Mosque of Mohammed Ali, with its slender minarets reaching towards the heavens, looked like a vision of Paradise, and might well be the end and aim of many an earthly pilgrimage.

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## THE GHOST OF ST. ELSPETH.

BY GEORGE FOSBERY.

## I.

**A**MOS GUINGELL was the ne'er-do-weel of the Cornish village of St. Elspeth.

While the fishermen went out in the boats to earn their living, Amos would sit idly on the cliff and flick pebbles into the heaving water below. When the village folk flocked to the town on market-day, Amos was the only one who omitted to combine business with pleasure, and who invariably returned in a condition the reverse of sober. When his neighbours had gone to bed, and had fallen into their first sweet sleep, Amos would reel down the cobble-paved street with clattering footsteps, and with a coarse song upon his tongue. On Sunday, when all other respectable people had gone up the hill to the church on the cliff, Amos was generally gazing dreamily at the Red Rock Lighthouse out at sea, or prowling around in search of something to appropriate, or of an opportunity for damaging his neighbours' property. Amos never honestly earned anything; and consequently he was never in possession of any spare cash; except when, by means of persuasion and threats artfully intermingled, he prevailed upon his grandmother to give him a shilling or two.

Granny Guingell was quite a public functionary at St. Elspeth. Not only did she clean out the church and act as pew-opener, but whenever an increase of the population was expected, Granny Guingell's services were engaged. Woe betide every interested person if they were not! She had been present in her professional character and as presiding genius at the arrival of every human novelty in that community for well-nigh fifty years. Thus she came to be considered, or at any rate she came to consider herself, indispensable at every such ceremony; moreover, she let people know it.

At this very time she was anxiously looking forward to a call on business of this same profitable nature. Peter Robbins, the grocer, danced to and fro from his wife behind the shop to Granny Guingell behind her knitting, twenty times a day to announce, so far, that he had nothing to announce.

Thus Granny Guingell had managed to put by a tidy sum against the evil day, if it should ever overtake her. And this same tidy sum her grandson's idleness and extravagance tended ever to diminish.

He was now in search of her and of her money, being, for some reason or other, more than usually pressed for lack of that commodity.



"Wherever be her got to? drat her! Her has got a proper lot o' cash put away somewheres or another. I've a-looked up the chimley, I've a-looked in the bed, I've a-looked in the old chiney tea-pot, I've a-dived down into the cellar, and clomb up into the roof; I've looked up and down everywhere; and for certain sure the money bain't in the house. Wherever can it be?"

While indulging in these edifying reflections, he slouched round a corner and came suddenly upon the person of whom he was in search.

A small knot of gossips stood and listened to Granny Guingell, who was entertaining them by holding forth upon her pet subject.

"Oh, it's no laughing matter, I tell 'ee! I wouldn't go nigh that there church after dark—not if you'd give me five hund'r'd pounds!"

"Yes, sure enough! I've heard tell dreadful tales about the ghosteses as was seen there in my poor father's time."

"'Tis a wisht old place!" said another.

"What is this 'ere ghostie like?" inquired some one.

"Like!" exclaimed Granny. "Did ye never hear tell? Why! Now—first thing you see, is St. Elspeth a-kneeling on the old tomb on the chancel, and after that——"

"Go it, Granny!" interrupted Amos, who was taking an unusual interest in the old lady's utterances.

"And after that, there be a ter-r-ible rumbling among the bones—and chains a-rattling—and sich *screams*—aw, my dear!"

Granny's audience shuddered at her description of the terrors of the church after dark. But—such is the inquisitiveness of human nature—not one of the little crowd was content until a complete description had been given of the very worst horrors for which Granny could vouch.

While they were thus engaged in shattering one another's nervous systems, the street door of the house before which they were standing opened, and Dr. Perran, the local practitioner, stepped out.

Granny appealed to the doctor for confirmation of the report that the church was haunted.

"I have often heard the tradition," replied the doctor. "I do not, however, believe in the truth of it, and I have never met with any one who claimed that he had seen the ghost with his own eyes."

Whereat Granny Guingell grew vastly indignant, and asserted that on several occasions, when her duty of cleaning out the church had detained her after sunset, she had seen the apparition of the saint, and had been terrified by all the concomitant circumstances of groans, bones, chains, and screams, which she believed to issue from the graves and vaults beneath the building.

Amos unexpectedly confirmed all that she had said, and added a good many other particulars on his own account. The slabs forming the floor of the church would sometimes stand on end—so he said—and clattering skeletons would rise and pervade the church in a

ghostly dance. He had seen them through the keyhole of the door ; and would not go near the place again after dusk for all the riches in England.

A burst of incredulous laughter, started by the doctor, followed the preposterous testimony of Amos. The group of gossips separated, and left Amos standing alone on the spot.

"Ghosts be hanged !" he muttered. "Granny is a deep 'un. I 'spect I knows now where she hides her money."

Dr. Perran paid a visit to a patient living at a distance of some miles from the village. Riding homewards, while darkness was setting in, he remembered the conversation which he had heard that afternoon on the subject of ghosts.

Every man on this earth has within him a courage which partakes of the nature of bravado. He is a strange mortal who does not at one time or another wilfully rush into a danger which he professes to despise, but through which, at the same time, he will feel proud to have passed. Dr. Perran did not believe in ghosts in general, still less in the ghost of St. Elspeth in particular. He resolved, however, to go out of his road, and to take the church on his way home ; not because he hoped or expected to meet with any supernatural experiences, but because he felt, in a modest sort of way, that there would be a certain satisfaction in boasting that he had been there after dark and had seen nothing.

## II.

GRANNY GUINGEL'S indispensable services seemed likely to be required sooner than had been expected.

Towards the hour of sunset, Peter Robbins ran hurriedly and excitedly up the street and knocked at the old wife's door. There came no reply to the summons. It was evident that Granny had gone out. The little grocer retreated a step or two from the door and surveyed the windows of the house, as if he expected them to help him.

At this moment his eye discerned a fluttering slip of paper pinned to the door-post. Granny had a business-like side to her character, and the slip of paper had been specially placed where it was, to meet the contingency of her presence being required, a possibility which was now fulfilled. Peter Robbins read the intimation which the old lady had providently affixed there. It was expressed in the significant and masterly idiom, "Gone up !"

For an instant Peter's bewildered imagination wrestled with the thought of the old lady's unexpected and glorious translation, in chariots of fire, to regions celestial. But on further reflection he concluded that the good dame merely wished to convey the announcement that she might be found, up the hill, at the church.

There was no time to be lost! Dr. Perran was known to be at a distance. Granny must be fetched immediately.

But if there was one thing in the world, and indeed there were many to which Peter Robbins' courage was unequal, it was the danger of traversing a churchyard after dark. He remembered, too, that Granny Guingell had borne witness to the fact of the church being haunted. Nothing on earth would induce him to enter the building alone.

Peter gathered quickly about him a little troupe of friends, consisting chiefly of the gossips who had listened open-mouthed, that morning, to the grim particulars about the ghost, given by the old dame and her grandson Amos.

The little party ascended the hill by a winding path, and, having arrived at the summit, turned their faces to the church which stood looming before them in the darkness.

But we must hark back. At or about the time, when Peter Robbins knocked at Granny Guingell's door, Dr. Perran, returning to St. Elspeth rather earlier than he expected, turned his horse's head up the sloping turf of the hill whereon stood the church. As he came nearer he perceived, to his surprise, that there shone a light of some kind in the sacred building.

He picked his way among the graves, avoiding the slabs and stones for fear his approach should be discovered. Having dismounted, and hung his horse's bridle to a nail on the wall, he stole up to St. Elspeth's window, a gothic light filled with ancient glass, having a border or margin of transparent panes. The design in stained glass, represented the figure of the Saint herself. The window was six or seven feet high, and stood only three feet from the ground.

Putting his eyes close to a part of the transparent margin of the window, Dr. Perran tried to see what was taking place in the chancel.

He perceived the figure of a man who carried a lantern. The individual, whose face he was unable to espy, advanced to an ancient tomb let into the wall on the opposite side of the chancel. There he stopped. Then, after a rapid glance about him to see if he was alone, the man laid down his lantern and began to examine the tomb. He was evidently dissatisfied about something, and was heard to utter an oath. Then, taking a small iron bar from his pocket, he began deliberately to break open the lid of the tomb.

At this moment the mist that had been hanging over the sea drifted away, and through the clear atmosphere shone a brilliant shaft of light from the Red Rock Lighthouse. The powerful rays struck through the stained glass window at which Dr. Perran was standing, and flashed in the eyes of his horse close by.

The steed snorted, shook his bit, reared, and broke his rein. The doctor clutched at one of the streaming bands, and barely arrested the career of the frightened beast, as it snorted again wildly, and

plunged about on the slabs and stones in the graveyard. Dr. Perran was dragged unwillingly past the porch at the further end of the church.

At the same time an elderly female figure rushed in terror from the porch. She was apparently frightened at the strange noises made by the horse and by its struggling master. She screamed as she ran down the path, and plunged into the midst of a terrified party of villagers, who little recognised in her rapidly retreating figure and terror-stricken accents, the form and voice of Granny Guingell. Horrified in turn, and adding their cries to the din, the scared villagers fled in any and every direction.

Dr. Perran's horse, having broken away from him, that gentleman returned to the church in order to find out, if possible, what had given rise to all this commotion. Being far too matter-of-fact to attribute any of these events to supernatural causes, he felt it his duty to go back and curtail the sacrilege in the church of which he had been an unexpected witness.

He entered the porch and tried the door, which opened easily. Indeed, the key was on the outside of the lock; but, for some reason or other, it had become firmly fixed, and would not turn in its place.

Pushing open the church door, Dr. Perran entered.

The lantern still stood upon the floor before the tomb. Although it shed little light around the chancel and the body of the church, the Doctor could discern one object which arrested his attention.

On the pavement within the altar-rails, and close to the lantern itself, lay the prostrate figure of a man.

On the wall close by, and described on the flat surface above the ancient tomb, was a perfect representation of St. Elspeth's window, cast there by the brilliant beams from the Red Rock Lighthouse.

Doctor Perran went up the church, and, by the aid of the lantern, recognised in the seemingly lifeless face of the man the features of—Amos Guingell!

The Doctor soon found that Amos was more frightened than hurt. Reassured by the voice of a friend in need, the youth rose and seized the Doctor's arm. He asked whether the latter had seen and heard the ghosts and their goings on.

Doctor Perran asked what Amos referred to, but the lad appeared to be too frightened to explain. The Doctor, therefore, took up the lantern and led him away.

On the road back to the village Amos gave an account of himself.

He had, as it appeared, got himself into debt, and was unable to procure money wherewith to get himself out again. He had asked Granny Guingell again and again for cash, but she always refused him. Knowing that she must be possessed of a considerable sum of money, he had watched her movements for some time with great persistency in the hope of discovering the hiding-place of her pile. It was not till this same day that he learnt what he wanted.

Having followed her up to the church, when she went to clean it out, he observed her in the act of removing a stone or slab from the ancient tomb in the chancel. From the space beneath the stone she took a large bag of coin, to which she added a further sum, and which she afterwards replaced, covering it with the stone in such an ingenious way that Amos tried in vain to find out the secret of displacing it.

It may here be mentioned that when Granny had replaced her stone, she intended to leave the church. She found, however, that the key of the door had stuck fast (owing, as she little thought, to a judicious application of mud and wadding by Amos). Being unwilling to leave the door of the holy edifice open, Granny had sat down on the bench within the porch to contemplate the situation and to devise means of making the lock act again. Very soon the worthy dame, fatigued after her labours, fell into a pleasant doze, from which she was rudely awakened—firstly, by the clinking of the bar used by Amos; and, secondly, by the clatter made by the Doctor's steed. Thinking herself pursued by the agents of the Evil One, she had left the place with less dignity than speed, and had consequently frightened the search-party of villagers into fits.

To return to Amos. He had scarcely struck his first blow with the iron bar, he said, when the church seemed to become alive with lights. Thinking that his eyes had played him a trick, he continued his battering operation, when he heard a series of sounds calculated to make the stoutest heart quail—the rattling of bones, the clanking of chains, snorts, groans, footsteps, and the clang of hoofs. Of course Dr. Perran easily accounted for everything in his own mind by a recollection of the movements of his champing and terrified horse—all of which weird noises, followed by ear-splitting and heart-rending shrieks and yells, had reduced Amos's nerves to a state bordering on collapse. He was standing, so he said, in the middle of the chancel in an agony of terror—not knowing whether to remain or run away, whether to pray or curse—his hair on end, his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth, and his knees knocking together like ninepins, when a crowning horror met his gaze. Suddenly a flash as of lightning half-blinded him. Turning his eyes away from the direction whence it had come, he witnessed, to his eternal terror, an apparition of the good saint Elspeth herself, dressed exactly in the fashion with which he had been familiar since his childhood—namely, that depicted in the stained-glass window. There could be no doubt about it whatsoever. He had seen a ghost, and he never wished to see another. No wonder he had dropped down all of a heap where he stood!

Dr. Perrin told Amos what had taken place outside the church, how the horse had broken loose; how he (the doctor) had called to the beast and tried to soothe it with the jargon usual on such occasions—such as, "Whoa, pretty! Coop! Coop! Coop!" and so on—(all of which added to Amos' bewilderment at the time). He described

how a female figure (possibly that of Granny Guingell) had emerged unexpectedly from the porch, and how the old lady had spread the contagion of fear to a number of people from the village who were at that moment entering the churchyard. He explained how the various noises had been mistaken by Amos for supernatural sounds, and attributed the mistake the lad had made to the suggestions of an evil conscience.

Amos admitted the justice of all that the doctor said, but asked in trembling tones—

“But, the ghost? Didn’t I see it with my own eyes?”

“What you mistook for a ghost, Amos, was the picture cast on the wall by the rays of the Red Rock lighthouse, as they shone brightly through the saint’s window, and reproduced there the stained-glass representation of St. Elspeth.”

Amos listened in silence, but remained incredulous. Nothing would ever convince him that he had not seen a ghost; and as nothing ever persuaded him again to enter the church alone, Granny’s hoard was left, like the bones of the surrounding dead, to rest in peace.

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### A BROTHER OF PITY.

At his Monastery door,  
When the close of day was come,  
With his book of holy lore,  
Musing sat the good Jerome—  
Looking out with tranquil eyes  
At the glorious Eastern skies.

To him came a murmur low  
From the peaceful cloistered walk,  
Where the Monks passed to and fro,  
And across their cheerful talk  
Acolytes’ young voices clear  
Fell upon his dreaming ear.

Out before him stretched the sands,  
Far as ever eye could see,  
Mile on mile of barren lands  
Broken not by shrub or tree;  
Save where, at the well hard by,  
Rose a palm tree towering high.



Quoth the Prior, "Life is good  
Even in this desert air,  
All Thy works when understood  
Are most beautiful and fair;  
True indeed was David's word,  
All the earth is Thine, O Lord!"

Suddenly a cry arose,  
From the Monks, a cry of dread,  
"See yon form that moves and grows,  
Creeping on with stealthy tread—  
Surely 'tis some evil beast  
Seeking for its evening feast!"

"Outlined 'gainst the darkening sky,  
'Tis some fearsome beast of prey!  
And how fast it draweth nigh—  
Come, good Prior, come away—  
Look, its fangs are red with gore!  
Quick, and let us bar the door!"

"'Tis a Lion from the plain,"  
Quoth the Prior in accents calm,  
"And the creature seems in pain;  
Nay, good brothers, fear no harm—  
Hath not said the voice Divine,  
All the forest beasts are Mine?"

Vainly did the Monks implore,  
For the Prior would not heed:  
"Wherefore should we close our door  
To a living thing in need?  
It perhaps has hither strayed,  
Dumbly seeking for our aid."

With his hungry eyes aflame,  
And his great mouth open wide,  
Limping on, the Lion came,  
Halted at the Prior's side,  
And with roar subdued and faint  
Held his paw up to the Saint.

Marvelling stood the little band,  
Such a wondrous sight to see,  
As the Monk with practised hand  
Took the great paw tenderly,  
And with one sharp wrench had drawn  
From the wound a cruel thorn.

Then he called for water there,  
Washed away the dust and blood,  
Bound it up with skilful care—  
And as if he understood,  
All the while, with patient grace,  
Gazed the Lion in his face.

*A Brother of Pity.*

Quoth the Prior, "The wound will heal,  
 Now, good Lion, go thy way :  
 He shall share our evening meal,  
 And no doubt, at break of day,  
 Of our strange guest we shall find  
 Only footprints left behind."

But next morning, at the door,  
 Still the forest king they found,  
 Holding up his wounded paw,  
 As he crouched upon the ground :  
 Waiting thus with trustful eyes  
 For the good Monk's surgeries.

So the days and weeks wore on,  
 And the hurt healed sure and slow,  
 Till all trace of it was gone—  
 But the Lion would not go !  
 Yet no lamb in pastures green  
 Gentler than the beast was seen !

Thus it happened in the end,  
 That the creature fierce and rude,  
 Came to be the trusted friend  
 Of the little brotherhood :  
 And until the day he died  
 Never left the Prior's side.

Of his love spake good Jerome—  
 "In the heavenly citadel,  
 Where we make our lasting home,  
 Brother Lion with us shall dwell :  
 In that land of peace and joy  
 Where they hurt not nor destroy."

Centuries passed, St. Jerome's name  
 Rose a star in earth's dark night,  
 And the lustre of his fame  
 Filled the Church of Christ with light  
 Faith's defender, steward wise  
 Of God's deepest mysteries.

And across the ages dim  
 Comes this legend of the Saint,  
 Thus Bellini pictured him,  
 In a chamber old and quaint,  
 Reading in his still retreat,  
 With his Lion at his feet.

Lies no lesson hidden here  
 In this love so deep and wide,  
 Holding every creature dear  
 For the sake of Him who died ?  
 He who marks the sparrow's fall  
 Hath a value set for all.

CHRISTIAN BURKE.

## OLD UNCLE ABE.

BY ADA M. TROTTER.

OLD Uncle Abe had the reputation of being the wealthiest man in the State of Vermont.

He had no wife, no child, no relative save a distant cousin, who had deeply offended him by choosing to marry an artist in spite of all his warnings against such a disastrous course. Guy Hallet, however, made a good husband, for he was a worthy young man, but Uncle Abe was faithful to his prejudices, and ignored the daring couple.

"What would become of Uncle Abe's money when Providence saw fit to remove him to a higher sphere?"

This question disturbed the serenity of the townsfolk, who readily adopted the title of "Uncle" in addressing the object of so much solicitude; indeed, to many it came quite natural to say "*dear* Uncle Abe."

Now this story begins on a certain winter day, which for the twenty preceding years had been kept by all as Uncle Abe's birthday, for it came at a slack season and gave everyone an opportunity to do him honour.

His housekeeper, Mrs. Mandy, provided a sumptuous repast for the guests. She was especially famous for her chicken salad, so that report said the very chickens fled at her approach, and "the help" declared herself fairly "tuckered out" with beating eggs for the feast.

On the morning in question one team after another was "hitched up," and the owners, in Sunday array, drove merrily over the snow to the Spring Farm.

"Well, I declare if there isn't Mira Glen with that good-for-nought husband of hers, coming as gay as you please behind us!" said Aunt Sue, grimly, from the recesses of her buffalo rugs. "Now, Susan Jane, I do hope you've got something that will please your uncle this year. Those 'sthetic things he can't abide. He threw the sunflowers down behind the sofa, and says he: 'Got plenty in my garden, Susan Jane, without you bringing them into the house.' He don't take things pleasant when he don't like 'em, don't Uncle Abe!"

"Well, I'm sure," said Jane, "if he don't like 'em, he needn't to; and it's the last thing I'm going to make for him, and no one needn' turn so grumpy at a pair of wool slippers such as these."

She held up a pair of sulphur-green slippers. Aunt Sue shook her head in a dissatisfied manner.

"He won't like anything 'sthetic—you can't expect it of him. He's passed his life 'mongst cows and barns, an' merchants an' money-

grubbin'. I *do* wish you had more sense, Susan Jane. You're your mother over again—jest as shiftless!"

"As for sense," remarked Susan Jane, briefly, "I'd like to know the sense of our going to Uncle Abe's to-day. If you know where it lies, I wish you'd tell *me*, Aunt Sue?"

"You're always such a one for reasons!" snapped Aunt Sue. "We always *have* been for this twelve year and more; 't isn't likely we're going to give out when there's so many others going."

"More than usual, Susan!" said Uncle Peter, morosely. "I'm downright 'sprised to see Almira. Everyone knows as Uncle Abe told her she'd no business to marry that painting fellow."

"Well, he *do* keep her somehow, and she's a happy woman," said Susan Jane.

"Slaving all the time for her children, and not a new gown to her back since she was married!" snapped Aunt Sue.

Merrily rang the sleigh-bells; truly it did seem as though everyone in the village was to be present to-day. What did it mean?

The hall and parlours were crowded, but Aunt Sue was not above getting her rights by pushing for them, and soon presented herself and niece at the footstool of Uncle Abe. This is of course symbolical, for Uncle Abe had never owned a footstool, and would have scorned its use before company even had he possessed one. His favourite chair, with a high straight back, was set by the hearth, and he was seated, his cheeks distended by a very unamiable grin as he watched the good folk pushing their way to pay him honour. He often turned from the scene to the wood-fire, playing with the logs as if he loved to watch the sparks fly out into the room, keeping people waiting for a word and look until they were scorched by the fierce fire.

"Uncle Abe, many happy returns of the day," said a cheerful voice at his elbow. "We're come, Almira and I; we are quite willing to forgive and forget, since you went to the trouble of asking us to come especially."

Uncle Abe turned and gave a cynical look at the bold speaker, who presented a frank, manly appearance as he pushed forward his blushing little wife.

"Glad enough to make up to the old man!" sneered one, audibly. Uncle Abe glanced round, but he did not speak, nor did he answer the cordial greeting of the young man except by suddenly putting out his hand as if he was glad to see him—a piece of favour jealousy noted by the lookers-on.

Presently a lawyer from town, who was watching everything with keen eyes and inscrutable countenance, whispered something to Uncle Abe, and with a nod of assent the old man rose to his feet.

Time had dealt kindly with him and his seventy-two years; he was vigorous, full of life. Many a one looking at him believed the doctor's oft-repeated prophecy—"that Uncle Abe would outlive most of the people who came to pay him court." He had a fine head and face,

and his expression was not unkindly ; many people would have rated him as a very simple man, liable to be deceived by his neighbours ; a good physiognomist, however, would have seen this contradicted by the keen expression of the large blue eyes. Uncle Abe did not owe his fortune to chance ; a shrewder man than he could not be found in Vermont.

"Dear Uncle Abe ; how well he looks !" said Aunt Sue, audibly.

The old man's eye rested on her, twinkling with amusement.

"My friends—for I suppose I may call you so ?" he began.

"I should hope so," echoed from every side.

"Well, you are all so kind in coming to see a lonely old man, that I thought I'd send for my lawyer to come and help me make a speech to-day."

"He's going to make his will," was the next whisper in circulation, and rapid interchange of ideas on that point made a buzz in the room, only silenced by an imperative call from the lawyer.

"I daresay, now, some of you have wondered what under the sun I mean to do with my money when I'm gone ?"

"Oh, no ! 'twasn't any of our business," from all.

"Well, it wasn't, and it isn't now ; but circumstances have altered with me, and so I mean to explain matters. I've always had an idea, that a man has a perfect right to dispose of his property as he likes."

"Of course, of course !" Perfect unanimity of opinion testified by chorus.

"Well, I'm glad you agree with me. I suppose you'd like to know what I was worth ten years ago. Mr. Stubbs here will tell you."

All eyes were turned on the lawyer, who consulted some notes in his hand, and replied calmly—

"Just over one million, sir."

"Well, I've been more than half a century putting it up," said Uncle Abe ; "and I've got no wife or child to leave it to—you all know that."

A chorus of impatient voices replied to this. Uncle Abe was ver long in coming to the point !

"Well, now, I took to thinking a deal on the subject. When I was a poor boy in New York, I fell sick and was carried to the hospital. There I lay for many a week, tended well, and discharged cured, and with a book of good advice given me into the bargain. The first thousand dollars I made that I could spare, I sent to that institution, and I considered that if I divided up my money and left it to half-a-dozen such institutions, I should not be far out of the way. I made a calculation on the foundation that I should only live to be threescore years and ten, and I kept such a sum as I thought would keep me in life as long as that."

Dead silence ! Had there been a chorus it would have been of curses on the old man for outwitting them.

Uncle Abe sat down ; and the lawyer began to speak.

"Uncle Abe wishes me to tell you the rest of the story," said he. "I regret to say that the money set aside as a provision for his old age, is lost by a bank failure. He is now too old to enter into active business again, and will have to be indebted to you, his friends, who love him so well, for a home for the rest of his days. His tastes, as you know, are simple, and he will endeavour to repay your kindness by making himself a very agreeable inmate."

The silence of stupefaction which followed this speech was suddenly broken by loud-spoken comments. The lawyer was seized upon as he tried to leave the room, and fruitless efforts were made to extract more details from him ; but he slipped out of the detaining hands before the angry folks could formulate their queries.

Uncle Abe saw everything from his seat by the blazing fire.

"The idea of expecting us to support him !" he heard from one to whom an hour ago he had been "Dear Uncle Abe."

"He never did anything for us," from another.

"I can't have an old man pottering round my house, anyhow," said another voice.

"Charity begins at home. I've got five children to support."

"There's plenty of room in your house, Aunt Sue—do take him in, and I'll take all the trouble of him," said a pleading voice.

Uncle Abe darted a quick glance at Susan Jane ; he listened intently for the answer.

"You never had a grain of sense in your life, Susan Jane ! Don't you know as like as not he'll live for twenty years or more ?"

"I hope he'll live forty," said Susan Jane. "I'll work for him as long as I have two hands. Do let him come, Aunt Sue."

"Mind your own business !" said Aunt Sue ; "you don't know nothing of the world. It is easy giving away other folks' victuals ; wait till you've got some of your own."

There was a sob from Susan Jane. Uncle Abe beckoned her to him ; she bent down and kissed him.

"I made some slippers for your birthday," she said. "They're not very pretty, but they're warm. You'll wear them, won't you, Uncle Abe ?"

"Ay, I'll wear them," he said, an odd smile distorting his face as he opened the parcel. "No, they're not pretty, Susan Jane ; they're too green or too yellow, which is it ? Well, I'll wear them. What are you crying for, child ?"

"I was wishing I knew enough to teach school and earn some money," said she. "I guess I could earn enough to keep you, Uncle Abe. Anyhow, I've got ten dollars, that's something. Could you live long on ten dollars, Uncle Abe ?"

Uncle Abe was silent for a while ; then, not being one who took presents gracefully, said, "he guessed he'd have to."

"Uncle Abe," said Almira gently,—the girl whose marriage with



the young artist he had condemned so thoroughly—"Guy has gone to get the sleigh ready, and I am come for you. We hope you will try and put up with the small house and the children; we will make you heartily welcome if you will come to us."

"Ah!" said Uncle Abe, rising with alacrity. "Well! there's nothing like hitting the nail on the head. I'll come now. Mrs. Mandy can give me a few things in a hand-bag, and send the rest after me."

He patted Susan Jane on the head, and smiled as he saw how rapidly the sleighs were driving away from the door; no one had wished him good-bye. He went back and said a few words to his housekeeper.

"Ready, Uncle Abe," said Guy, as he came in hastily. "Come along then."

Mira and Susan Jane buttoned his coat tenderly about him, and nearly smothered him with woollen wraps. Guy gave him his arm down to the sleigh, which was nothing more than a box on runners.

"The children will be glad to see Uncle Abe," said Almira; "they're very fond of company."

The children were on the watch at the door of the small red house where Guy made a home for his wife, and kept the pot boiling by selling his pictures as fast as he could paint them.

\* \* \* \*

A year passed by, and Uncle Abe still sat as a guest at Guy Hallet's table. It would be absurd to suppose that an extra mouth to feed made no difference to the Hallets' household. Guy worked harder at his pictures, and when summer came and there was no sale for them, he might have been seen often at work in the fields helping the farmers during the busy season. Almira worked harder than before to clothe and feed her children on as little as might be; but Uncle Abe was never permitted to feel for a moment that his presence was a tax on the slender resources of the household.

"Your husband's a fine man—uncommon fine," he observed one day to Almira, as Guy came back at noon for his dinner after toiling from early morning in the harvest fields; "but I heard that artist-fellow over at Montpelier say as he'd never be worth anything till he'd been to Europe."

"That's very true," said Guy cheerily, coming in at the door. "But you see, Uncle Abe, if we can't do what is the very best, we must take the second best; and I have to go lower still to third or fourth—for I have to teach myself as I go along."

"I've never been to Europe," said Uncle Abe, after a long silence. "I think I must go some day or other."

Husband and wife exchanged a look of amusement. Uncle Abe often spoke as if he had command of a fortune still. Susan Jane spent all her spare time at the Hallets', and an odd kind of affection grew up between her and the lonely old man.

"Susan Jane," he said, one day, "would you like to finish your education in Europe?"

Susan Jane clasped her hands in ecstasy. "Oh, Uncle Abe, if only wishes were any use! I've wished to go to Europe ever since I knew enough to wish for anything," she replied.

"Ah!" he said, nodding his head.

When the harvesting was over, the dinners began to get very meagre—some of Guy's pictures were sent back as unsaleable. Almira, as she pinched herself that others might have more to eat, was tormented by a hacking cough which was obstinate in refusing to be cured by common remedies. Guy began to look very sober whilst he was at work, but after all, there was an element of cheerfulness always diffused throughout the household by the bright-faced Almira.

"I want you to ask Susan Jane to dinner on Sunday," said Uncle Abe, one day. It was the Sunday of Thanksgiving week. Susan came, and though the dinner was a meagre affair, everyone was so bright and cheerful that it might have been a feast which was spread on the snow-white cloth. After dinner they sat round the fire, and Uncle Abe said he'd tell them a story. It was a long round-about tale of an old man who was very rich and who wanted his money to pass into good hands, and so he tried to prove the sincerity of his friends by pretending to be very poor.

"Well, well!" said gentle Almira. "I think he ought not to feel very angry when he was disappointed in their behaviour, because he had no business to deceive them in that way, you know. He must not judge them too hardly"—for the old man's eyes had flashed as he told the story.

Uncle Abe laughed; there was a knock at the door just then, and in walked Mr. Stubbs the lawyer. He came in with a merry twinkle in his eye, and joined the happy circle round the fire.

"Have you taken the passages?" said Uncle Abe, presently.

"Yes, here they are!" said he, smiling, as he put an envelope in the old man's hand.

"Well, then, I think we'd better arrange our plans," said he. "Guy, give me my spectacles and take a look at these. Can you be ready to sail in a fortnight, Almira?"

"Why, these are tickets for an ocean steamer," cried Guy, looking at the lawyer for a meaning, thinking Uncle Abe was suddenly bereft of his senses.

"Well, the fact is, I'm about tired of playing at poverty, and I'm going to give it up," said Uncle Abe. "I've a fancy that Almira's cough wants care, and Guy here and Susan Jane want more education; so, children, if you are willing to share an old man's wanderings, away we go to Europe before the month is out."

\*     \*     \*     \*     \*

The astonishment of the townsfolk knew no bounds; jealousy of the Hallets, and wrath at their own short-sighted folly, filled their cup

of mortification to overflowing. They seized the lawyer and insisted on pouring out their reasons for keeping aloof from Uncle Abe to his unwilling ears.

"We thought he'd lost everything," said one.

"Ah, so did Guy Hallet!" said the lawyer, quietly.

"And didn't he leave all his money to the hospitals?"

"Not a bit of it."

"Is it true that he has made his will?"

"Quite true," was the reply. "I have his permission to say that Almira, Guy, and Susan Jane will share the estate after his death; and, until that time, will be the recipients of a handsome income. Uncle Abe is worth a good two millions."

"And they are all going to Europe?"

"Yes! Susan Jane is going to Paris to school, and Guy with his wife and children and Uncle Abe are going to winter in Italy. And if Guy Hallet doesn't turn out one of the first artists in the world, my name's not Joseph Stubbs!"

## A CHRISTMAS CAROL.

BY C. J. LANGSTON.

ONCE a year the clouds are parted,  
When in undertone I hear,  
Blessings from the kindly-hearted,  
Distant voices coming near.

Long ago the happy meeting,  
Fuller friendship since avowed;  
Long ago, and still the greeting  
Breaks through Christmas cold and cloud.

Other times, so great the distance,  
Never swells the slightest sound;  
Stronger than the soul's resistance,  
Are the vapours which surround.

But the year is light with gladness,  
When the Birth of Christ draws nigh;  
And the joy-bells cleave the sadness,  
Shaking blessings from the sky.

## IN A CATHEDRAL.

BY GILBERT H. PAGE.

FROM the ordeal of the family breakfast-table, from the torturing remarks and surmises of the wholly indifferent, Eva Mesurier escaped at the earliest possible moment out-of-doors. At her heart was a new and sharper pain. Hitherto there had always remained a hope, however improbable. Now the song was out, the book closed, the door upon the past for ever shut.

As Miss Mesurier walked through the Cathedral Close, the first drops of a coming shower fell in big splashes upon the flagged pathway, the summer sky rapidly darkened, the birds were silent in the leafy recesses of the lime-trees. Ten o'clock service was just over, and the handful of people emerging from the western door glanced up at the clouds, opened umbrellas, and hurried past her with lifted skirts and down-bent heads. "I had better go inside until it is over," she decided; and at that moment the rain descended with the suddenness, swiftness and force only seen in July rain-storms. Sheets of water seemed to suspend themselves from the Cathedral walls, torrents poured from the gaping mouth of every gargoyle, rivulets ran foaming along every gutter and side path. But just by reason of this falling wall of water, which thus appeared to isolate it from the rest of the world, Eva found the cold and solemn spirit of the Cathedral more consoling than ever before.

She knew the place well outside and in; for years every stone and corner had been familiar to her. She could have found her way blindfolded through the long drawn aisles from shrine to shrine; she could point out when the harebell trembled on its delicate stem, high up on the coping above the "Slype Gate"; but most faithfully had she kept the secret of the starlings' nest in the tracery over the little northern door. The serried pillars, the ever-succeeding arches, the loftiness, the silence, the white light falling from windows whose mediæval glories were shattered by Cromwell's troops, the dim recesses and shadowy-filled corners, exercised a charm upon her ever new and ever strange. The old walls whispered to her their secrets; she saw the whole marvellous building as it first existed, an idea in the brain of one man. She watched its creation; she followed the thoughts of those who built it; the stories of the men and women who had prayed in it or walked through it ever since; she communed with the gentle ghosts of the dead, who lie buried beneath the pavements, and, ceding to the magic of their silent voices, she let them carry her soul away from a cold and narrow present to sunny dreams of the past—sometimes into the mysterious past of æons ago, sometimes into the dearly-loved past of a few years since.

To-day, as she wandered aimlessly along the matted aisles, reverie at once began to steal over her, for some one was practising on the organ, and a wondrous melody awoke beneath skilfully-pressed fingers, now rising triumphant and rolling away into the shadows of the groined roof, now sinking into plaintive cadences, which floated out through the open doors, to lose themselves in the ever-falling rain. Myriads of flashing hues seemed to descend straight from heaven, and to break into drops which rebounded high in air as they struck the pavement.

The Cathedral was not quite empty. Two young men stood by St. Lutolf's shrine; strangers evidently, for one read from a guide-book, and a verger in his rusty black gown conversed with the other. What was there in the turn of this man's head, in the broad tweed-covered shoulders, that made such a strange feeling, half terror, half rapture, catch at Eva's heart? But when she saw his face, as he moved to speak to his friend, the old disappointment was renewed.

The music played on.

Eva sat in her favourite seat in the transept, looking out through the open door. At her feet was the gravestone of a woman whose writings had peopled the world with bright children of the imagination—with girls witty, charming, good; young men grave and gay; with valetudinarians who impose no burden, with rattles who cannot weary, with bores who cannot bore; who has made the names of these immortal with her own so long as books shall last. But a woman who, for all her fame, missed the best of life, who never had a child to call her mother, who never knew the warmth of happy love. Does fame make up for the want of these things?

The music still played on.

She mused upon the mystery of life—its waste of powers, its frustration of predestined ends. Here one with treasures of love and devotion to lavish is pushed by circumstance aside; there another seeking this very treasure passes blindly by to break his heart and lose his life in the search.

The spirit of the dead poet, whose passionate verse lives for ever in the hearts of his lovers, passed close to Eva, walking through the aisle he had paced so assiduously for a short space of time in his short life. Following him came spectres of his poverty, his genius, his despair; of the girl, cold and inappreciative, who carried in a careless hand the letters he had written her, and which were destined to be sold one day for money to a curious public; of the friend who understood what friendship means, and watched out the long death-agony beneath Italian skies. Eva herself wandered over the Campagna, walked with eager steps through the sunny streets of Rome; saw, fancifully, sights and peoples she was never in reality to see, tasted in imagination the perfect joy she was never in reality to know.

The music still played on.

There was no one now in the Cathedral but the young man in the tweed suit. He was standing at a little distance from her, looking

towards her. The light from the great west window fell upon his head and face. Ah, her first impression had been right, after all! It was unmistakably Marcus Eversley. Wonderful delicious fortune which threw them thus again together! He came immediately over to her, his eyes alight with the interest tempered by deference which had always thrilled her. He gave the odd little bow she remembered so well.

"Who would have thought of finding you here?" he said. "What an unexpected pleasure! Are you staying in the town?"

"We have been living here long," she answered, rather bewildered.

"Not so very long," he corrected, with a smile. "It is not so very long, surely, since we were rowing together in Morecambe Bay? Do you remember?"

Could she forget the happiest topmost hour of all the happy hours that she had known him? Again the boat seemed to rise and swell upon the glittering, green, evening waters; the rosy radiance of the after-glow spread half over the heavens, and the tapering masts of the shipping were outlined delicately against it; the hulks, the barges, all the crazy, picturesque buildings that jostled together to the very harbour's edge, made a broad and black division between sea and sky. Marcus rested on his oars and looked at her just as though he were going to speak. Between terror and joy the moment was intensely painful; and then suddenly she read in his eyes that some stronger impulse checked the words as they were about to flow, and the desire left him. But, for all that, the moment lived a golden one in her memory, for in it she had partially divined his feelings for her.

"Have you still your passion for all water?" he said. "Do you remember our little stream, so swift and clear, which runs between the tall grasses of our meadows at Upton? Do you remember how we sat there together and looked at the silver minnows slipping over the sandy bottom, our own faces smiling up at us from a background of blue June heaven, the summer flies dimpling the water's surface? Shall we sit there again one day? Though it is pleasant enough, too, to sit with you here, and curious for me to be thus talking with you above the graves of the dead."

The music still played on.

Eva looked at the strong, calm face of the man beside her, at its beauty and its power, at its intense vitality, and the old familiar disbelief in death, that had been wont to lay hold of her at uncertain times, once more possessed her. It was well for reason to assert that she herself must die; for experience to prove that other people did die. When she looked at Marcus she refused to credit that death and he could have anything in common. Those meaning eyes could never become dim and sightless; that ruddy cheek could never lose its glow; the virile hand, so capable for work, so prompt for defence, could never hang inert and powerless, any more than she herself, in whose veins to-day youth and health and happiness coursed with long-



forgotten vigour, should ever become old and listless, indifferent and cold.

"You shall teach me some more wild flowers," he went on. "I have not forgotten your lesson in the woods at Arlington. Golden rod and golden ragwort, purple scabious and purple agrimony. You see I remember them all. Was not that a walk—over the bare hills and down to the heart of the wood, last year's dry leaves carpeting the ground beneath our feet, the trees full of sunshine that fell in splashes of gold upon the path before us, upon the wayside mosses, upon your dress! I remember that white dress of yours so well. Do you wear it still?"

"And," said Eva musingly, "when at last we left the woods and followed the others over the village green to that curious, old-fashioned inn where we had tea."

"And where I took you by the arm, and said, 'Now I will show you a pretty woman'; and there was your own image smiling out at you from a blurred and ancient looking-glass."

"Yes, it was silly, was it not? Yet I was pleased that you were pleased, and so I think I really did look well that day."

"Never was there such a capital meal as we then sat down to—such home-made bread, such butter and honey! And afterwards, when we found our way upstairs to the village assembly-room, and one of our party sat down to the loose-voiced piano and gave us waltzes, do you remember how we danced—you and I—round the empty room, while the summer gloaming gathered thick in the corners, and every moment through the open windows we saw the sky assume a deeper, darker blue? Do you remember?"

"And the drive home, when Jupiter, hanging low over the forest, began to assume his supremacy for the night. And the harbour lights, that dropped long, trembling reflections in the water; and the silent, empty streets; and how you stood with us all at the garden-gate while we said good-night. And how friendly you seemed, and yet the immense time you let slip before you came to see us again. Do you remember that?"

The music still played on.

"Do you not know why?" said Marcus, very earnestly. "I was afraid of myself, and I was not sure of you. I loved you, but I was proud, and I wanted a sign. And you were always as good and gay with all the world as you were with me; in fact, you seemed even more light-hearted when in company with others. Do you not remember?"

"That was the sign. How could you fail to understand it? With the world one can smile and be gay; with the beloved, one is silent through terror and through joy. But you never came to me for sympathy in vain; you never expressed the faintest wish to which I did not instantly respond. You had but to shake the bough ever so slightly, and the fruit would have fallen at your feet. But it was

not doubt of this that stayed your hand. There must have been something else. Do you not remember?"

"It is true," said he, "there were other things. I was young, and life with so many untried chances lay before me; I did not want to take an irrevocable step so soon. Then I was poor, I had my way to make; it seemed wiser to walk free. I was ambitious; it seemed easier to rise alone. I said to myself, 'Time enough in ten years, and though I lose her, there will still be fair fresh faces, kind eyes, and sweet lips to choose from.' For then I understood all these things very dimly. Now I know that the gift which I would not stretch out my hand to take was offered me by God Himself, and that there was none other like it in the world for me. I am telling you everything at last, Eva. Can you forgive me?"

"You are giving me Heaven. What is there to forgive?"

\* \* \* \* \*

The music had ceased.

Eva lifted her eyes. She was alone; the cathedral was empty. Through the open door she saw the rain had ceased too. The outside landscape, bathed again in strong sunlight, with every wet and glittering leaf flashing back like a looking-glass the colours of the sky, appeared, seen through these open doors, some brilliant jewel-picture set in the framework of grey stone wall.

There was a clinking of keys, and the organist let himself out at the iron gates dividing chancel from transept. As he approached, Eva saw it was young Dell, one of Dr. Armstrong's pupils. He stopped to speak to her.

"If I were to come round this afternoon about four, should I find Eva at home, do you suppose?"

It was of course for the Eva of a younger generation that the other Eva answered: "I will tell her you are coming."

"Oh, she wouldn't stay in for that!" remarked the boy ruthfully, but with such an obvious desire to be contradicted in his face that Miss Mesurier smiled.

"We shall see!" she said gently.

The young fellow blushed and grew embarrassed. He sought to turn the conversation.

"What did you think of those voluntaries I was playing? But—it's awfully rude of me, I know—but really you look as though you had been asleep!"

"I don't think that I have been asleep," said Eva; "but I was dreaming, perhaps."

Yes, dreaming that she was young again; that Marcus Eversley who had never spoken, who had drifted apart from her, of whom she had not heard for years, until with a sudden dreadful heart-pang she had read of his death in that morning's paper, was alive and young too, and that he loved her with the passion she had vainly spent on him.





Until the miracle of music works  
Under the Master's hands,

| And breathes a secret message to each soul,  
That each soul understands !

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## THE MIRACLE OF MUSIC.

THE music flows beneath Beethoven's touch  
 And finds mysterious way  
 To golden memories hid in all men's hearts,  
 Though heads be bowed and grey.

For, as the stately harmony floats by,  
 A vision of life's morn  
 Rises for one. Two figures, hand in hand,  
 Walking among the corn.

He sees the sunlight die along those fields,  
 And there comes out a star,  
 And then a little white sail glides from sight  
 Beyond the harbour bar.

They never met again who parted then  
 On that still autumn strand;  
 Yet surely on his soul there falls to-night  
 Touch of an unseen hand!

Then one—so old and lonely—lives again  
 In childhood's merry days.  
 What matter that the world forget or scorn?  
 He hears his mother's praise.

Next, in a heart grown somewhat hard and cold,  
 A long-forgotten face  
 Rises upon the music's softest tone,  
 And smiles from its old place.

Ah, could she but come back again to-night  
 (He knows not if she lives)  
 He would unsay some cruel words—and yet  
 He feels that she forgives!

And one, who dreamed good dreams and made them true,  
 Whose life has been a psalm,  
 Mounts on the melody to mystic realms  
 Where all is glad and calm.

Where, though grand problems and great tasks remain,  
 All helpless tears are done,  
 And man goes joyfully to work with God  
 Because they are at one!

For as mute exiles in unkindly crowds  
 Their home-sick memories bear,  
 So souls sit lonely in those hidden depths  
 No other soul can share.

Until the miracle of music works,  
 Under the Master's hands,  
 And breathes a secret message to each soul,  
 That each soul understands!

ISABELLA FYVIE MAYO.

## AUNT ORSOLA.

## I.

"ANNA *mia*, you are the luckiest girl in the world !"

Perhaps she was—you shall judge for yourself—but she certainly did not look as if she herself thought so.

The two sisters were pacing slowly down the one broad walk of their ill-kept garden. To their left lay the vineyard, to their right the house and its narrow strip of flower-garden in which huge oleanders bloomed and bushes of scarlet geranium blossomed, interspersed with such plants as could brave the red ochreous soil and the almost ever-beating sun. All wore an arid look—from the cracked plaster and blistered paint of the house to the dry, yellow grass that untidily bordered the path upon which the girls were lingering. But the spell of Italian loveliness lay upon all, and rendered almost beautiful what would have been unbearable in other lands.

In front of the little dwelling a vineyard terraced down to the shimmering sea ; right and left undulating hills thickly clad with olive trees ; behind them a chain of craggy heights, here and there crowned with feathery pines, but more often towering, bold and bare, and contrasting their red brown hues with the pure blue overhead.

Add to this the odour of aromatic herbs mingling with that of brine ; the song of the *cigala* ; a flood of golden sunshine steeping the earth and caressing the slumbering sea ; and you will have an outline of the scene in which Anna and Cordelia were wandering, and amid which they had been born.

Though respectively seventeen and eighteen they can indeed scarcely be said ever to have lived elsewhere. For their father, Count Altamonte, had died while they were quite children ; and, immediately after her husband's death, the Countess had retired permanently to the only property that remained to her, there to live in seclusion with her daughters upon the pittance that fell to them after the payment to the last centesimo of the Count's debts.

They were, as the Italians say, "noble as the sun and poor as the moon." But they all three bore their poverty bravely, and made the best they were able of the privations it imposed. They wore their cotton dresses to the last verge of possibility ; took an interest in all the little vicissitudes of their rustic neighbours—they had no others—went to mass on Sundays at the little church on the beach below ; and, all things considered, led a peaceful, if a monotonous life.

The house itself—it was not a cottage, for, unfortunately, in our



sense of the word, there *are* no cottages in Italy—would have been discomfort itself in any other land. The walls were stencilled; the floors of red brick, the furniture scant. And yet it was pleasant enough with the balmy summer wind setting the red cotton curtains softly waving, and with the song of the birds and the scent of the brine floating freely in through the widely opened windows and doors. And in winter, too, it was not without a certain cheeriness with a fire of mingled olive-wood and pine-cones blazing upon the only hearth the house possessed; save that in the kitchen, on which you could have roasted an ox whole, and which was never used unless on washing days; the modest cooking of the establishment being daily done on a brick range over a handful of charcoal.

The entire household numbered but five persons: the Contessa, her two daughters, and an old couple, Gianbattista and his wife Erminia; the former, vinedresser, gardener, and all else that might be required; the latter, housekeeper, cook and laundress. They had been with Countess Altamonte for over twenty years, and would have flung themselves into the fire to do either of their three mistresses a service. But neither of them was ever hard-taxed, mother and daughters being both kindly and amiable, and therefore not difficult to please. Added to that, the old couple seemed to find repose more wearisome than work. They were incessantly busy about something, save on Sundays; then, after mass, Battista might ever have been seen sitting in the sun or the shade, according to the season, in all the solemnity of horn spectacles and holiday clothes, puffing away at a well-blackened pipe; while Erminia, in blue spotted print and white apron, went the rounds upon a general inspection of all that the property produced. Nothing ever escaped her—from the purloining of a peach, or the abduction of a chicken, up to the going wrong of a wine vat, or the appearance of disease among the vines. Her sharp old eyes ferreted out everything.

"Yes, Anna," repeated Cordelia, "you are a lucky girl. Just think what a change!"

"Change, indeed! And it's just that——"

Anna paused in step and speech, stooped to pluck a sprig of thyme, turned slowly and seated herself upon the low, broad stone bench they had just passed. Cordelia sat down beside her.

Here and there a ray of sunshine penetrated the boughs of the venerable ilex overhead, to fall in splashes of golden light upon the two sisters—upon Cordelia's red-brown coil of hair and pink-and-white complexion, upon Anna's raven tresses and creamy skin. The soft dark eyes of the latter were dreamily fixed upon the shimmering sea below.

"Does it grieve you so to leave us, then?" She laid her head upon her sister's shoulder as she spoke.

"Yes, that it does—to the very heart."

"But it cannot be for very long, Anna. Aunt Orsola—grand-aunt, I should say—must be very old, and——"

"Yes, I know ; and I've tried to reconcile myself to the change ; but I cannot—I cannot."

"A change from night to day, almost from poverty to enormous wealth."

"Ah, Cordelia, I wish she had chosen you." I wonder if mamma were to write and propose your going instead——"

"Anna, it would be worse than useless. We have never seen Aunt Orsola—mamma never saw her but once, just before her marriage, yet we know what people say about her—full of antiquated notions—something like a mania in all that regards the nobility and dignity of her race."

"She has never thought of us in our poverty all these long years."

"Well, that's true ; but the case was different. While her nephew lived, she had an heir in the male line."

"Poor fellow ! What a pity he didn't stay at home instead of going to Africa and getting killed. I heartily wish he was alive again. And then, think of our aunt's insisting that there is to be no communication—that I am to be cut off from all I love. That I am—oh, she's a cruel old woman, that's what she is !"

"She's half mad, as I said before. And no wonder, considering the solitary life she leads, shut up, year after year, in that old feudal castle of hers."

"Battista knows the place. He lived on the estate when a boy. He must have seen our aunt. And then there's——" Anna stopped short and sighed.

"Yes, I know, Anna. Poor Alberto ! But do you think mamma would have allowed you to marry him ? With our nobility and name—a simple farmer almost ?"

"I am sure of it. Poor mamma has had a hard time of it ; she has learned that family without fortune is but a mockery. We haven't a relation in the wide world but Aunt Orsola, and she only deigned to notice us when she needed us. She had much better have left us in peace. She could leave her money to a hospital."

"And her name and title ?" asked Cordelia.

"I, for one, don't wish ever to be Marchioness della Rocca d'Oro. I could have been so happy here !"

Tears welled up into Anna's dark eyes as she said this. They blurred the brightness of the rippling waters upon which she was gazing. Another vision, too, rose before her. The stalwart young proprietor of a somewhat extensive and near-lying property ; handsome, kindly, open-hearted and deeply in love. The thought was too much, Anna lay her head upon her sister's shoulder and wept outright.

What a happy past was that which now floated up from memory's mystic depths ! The iris hues hindered aught less bright and beautiful than themselves from rising. Maternal and sisterly love, Battista and Erminia's affection. Then the innocent idyll that in the golden

sunshine, and amid the many-hued loveliness of her birthplace, had grown up to its present strength and beauty. The timid glances at mass, the occasional meeting of fingers at the Holy Font; the excursions up among the breezy heights, Alberto carefully leading his quietest horse, and doing all in his power to spare the Countess the smallest shock or jolt; she and Cordelia gaily leading the van, and springing like young goats amid the rocks and rosemary bushes; Battista and Erminia bringing up the rear with the provisions for the day. Alberto's first flowers, his unconnected, yet well understood words, the rosy Eden that suddenly blossomed around her, as one evening, on the little terrace overlooking the sea and beneath the white moonlight, the confession of mutual love had been sealed by a kiss. All, and a hundred times more, floated up before her, till, with a heart-broken voice, she cried, "Cordelia, Cordelia, I cannot, cannot go!"

"But what is to be done, dearest?"

"I don't know; but I will not go. Oh, yes"—correcting herself—"you must take my place! If one of us two is to become Marchioness Rocca d'Oro, it must be you, not I."

"But how, Anna?"

"I'm not quite sure yet; I must think it out well. You just help me to learn all I can about Aunt Orsola."

"It won't be much; nobody seems really to know her. We'll ask Battista."

"Battista can hardly tell us more than we know," said Anna. "Orsola Marchesa della Rocca d'Oro in her own right is a maiden of eighty, of enormous wealth. I think mamma said she never married because she couldn't find any one whose blood was sufficiently blue. She lives, shut up in her castle, as much as she possibly can, like her ancestors of a hundred years ago."

"Well, I don't know that I should object to that, Anna. I dare say the life is——"

"But I object. I'd rather share a hut with Alberto than possess all Rocca d'Oro!"

"Poor Anna! Well, what more?"

"That's all, I think. Oh, she hates progress, and says railroads are the invention of Satan."

"I don't see what excuse you can ever find. Have you asked Alberto to help you?"

"Yes; but he refused flatly. No one, he declared, should ever be able to say that he had uttered one word to hinder my going. Dear, noble, stupid fellow!"

"That's just like Alberto! I was sure——" Erminia's shrill voice calling them to their noonday dinner interrupted Cordelia's phrase. The two sisters rose and, hand in hand, proceeded towards the house.

## II.

It was a pretty picture. Alberto leaning over the little gate, his muscular arms reposing comfortably upon the topmost bar, and his admiring loving gaze fixed upon Anna within ; she standing with her coarse straw hat in her hand, and from time to time raising her soft dark eyes to his. The spreading pine overhead flung chequered shadows, soft and swaying, down upon the lovers, and now and again a prying sunbeam would steal in as if to peer at them. They never noted the golden spy, however, so wrapped up were they in themselves and each other. Nor did they notice the approaching steps of Cordelia and old Battista, she with a basket in her hand, he carrying one of those long bamboo canes, the upper end of which is split into a sort of funnel kept open by a cork and secured with wire—the implement with which, in primitive Italy, fruit is gathered from the tops of the high trees.

"We are going to get some figs for mamma," said Cordelia, stopping. "I think there must be some ripe by now. Will you come, Alberto?"

With a glad smile the young man opened the little gate and entered. The four took their way across the vineyard over to where an enormous fig-tree raised its leafy head. The warm air was redolent with the aroma of rosemary, southernwood, lavender, and a hundred aromatic herbs, while, from time to time, a fresher whiff floated up from below, bringing with it the acrid odour of brine. The *cigala* sang merrily in the golden sunshine, and the idle swish of waters upon the sands made itself heard at intervals. Three young voices rang out clearly, however, to which Battista's bass was now and again added. They were all so happy ; all was so beautiful and bright around, the sunshine of heart and heaven had put to flight, for the moment, even Aunt Orsola's menacing image.

Under the fig-tree they all sat down, the girls upon a flat yellow stone, the two men upon the red, roughly-hoed soil in front. Battista mopped away at his old bald head with a red cotton handkerchief that smelt strongly of stale tobacco ; Alberto drew out a couple of cigars and fumbled in his numerous pockets for the needful matchbox ; the girls fanned themselves, and, at times, also the two men, with their wide-brimmed hats.

"Now, Battista," said Cordelia, "we want you to tell us all you know about Aunt Orsola and Rocca d'Oro."

"About Rocca d'Oro as much as you please ; but about Signora Marchesa—well, I don't know what I can tell you. I scarcely ever saw her to speak to, and if I had to tell you all that the rest used to say about her, why, we should sit her till to-morrow. My memory, too, is so bad——"

"Here's a cigar to help it," said Alberto, handing him one.

The old man's dark eyes flashed with delight as he took it and lit

it, with a gusto that was pleasant to see. A cigar, and especially a good one like that, was a rare treat. A briarwood pipe and doubtful tobacco were his ordinary solace.

"What used they to say?"

"Oh, a thousand things—each stranger than the other."

"For example—?"

"Who can tell now? It is so long, long ago. And then, every one had something different. They even declared she was a sorceress and had made compact with——"

Battista broke off and crossed himself.

"But that's impossible, you know. You don't mean to say you believe that?"

"I can't tell," replied Battista; "I believe and I don't believe. She has a bad name all around, anyhow, in spite of her money."

"Yes?"

"What with her pride, her cats, and her geology——"

"Her what?"

"Her geology. The picture of a great tree; it hangs in the big hall, and instead of fruit it bears dukes, and marquesses, and princes. It is quite full of them. And her ladyship stands before it for hours, they say. I've even heard say it's a sort of Satan's mass-book—God forgive me!—and that she is bound to worship before it for a certain time every day. I myself saw her there once. They say she speaks to the princes and dukes, and once she was seen crying before them. If that's not sorcery, I don't know what is! She calls it geology, but other folk——"

"Genealogy, Battista. If you had ever dared look, you would have seen our name—mamma's, at least—there also."

"The saints forbid! I——"

"And the cats?" interrupted Anna.

"She used to have eight of them. They dined and supped with her; and they all had names."

"Well, they, at least, must be dead and gone long ago. Why, it's years and years——"

"Dead! Gone! You think so! They're no such thing"—here he lowered his voice. "They were no more real cats than we are."

"What are they, then?"

"The spirits of the dukes and princes painted upon the tree. There were beasts painted there, too; but beasts such as none of us ever saw—monsters—one woman with the tail of a fish, a green lion with—— it was the devil's book, I'm sure," concluded Battista, rising and picking up his cane, "and nothing will ever take the belief out of me. And you, Miss Anna, you just take old Tista's advice and keep away from Rocca d'Oro as far as ever you can."

Alberto could have hugged him for those words.

## III.

THE long, tiresome journey came to an end at last, and Anna found herself safely deposited at the Ivrea station. The town, once famous in Italian history, can still boast of many records of turbulent feudal times. Nowadays, however, it is noted for nothing in particular, save its carnival, which is still held with much gaud and glitter, and whose procession of armed knights, in the panoply and gear of dead centuries, issuing from the frowning old walls, gives no weak idea of gallants of days gone by thronging to a tournament.

The Piedmontese are certainly the English of Italy, and, going a step further, the people of the Canevesato and Monferrato may be likened to the Scotch. They are hardy, pugnacious, fiery, tenacious, and conservative to the backbone.

The nobility of these two districts is among the purest and best in the land; and of this nobility Orsola, Marchesa della Rocca d'Oro considered herself the culminating point.

To a certain extent her pretensions had been allowed, for the family—now reduced to her stately self and two penniless grandnieces whom nobody knew anything about—had certainly, in days gone by, been the first among all. Nobody could deny that. Nobody did deny it. But as time went on Orsola della Rocca secluded herself entirely from a world which she declared to be turning upside down, and buried herself amidst her boundless forests and broad lands, hugging her peculiar ideas more and more tenaciously, growing more and more reserved, and thus yearly widening the gulf between herself and the rest of mankind.

She gave money freely, when asked by her chaplain to do so; but unaccompanied by any outward sign of sympathy. Thus, to the worthy, at least, depriving the gift of half its value.

Her antiquated body-guard, Brigitta, seemed to be the only person for whom she ever openly expressed sympathy. Brigitta and her cats! For the descendants of the feline pets, mentioned by Battista, still flourished at the castle, though reduced to six.

With her usual despotic eccentricity the old lady had dictated the minutest particulars of Anna's journey. Her mother and sister were to accompany her to Ivrea, consign her to Brigitta, who would be there to receive her, and then, without an hour's delay, return whence they had come. Her letter had enclosed a note of a thousand francs for travelling expenses.

Countess Altamonte had obeyed to the letter, but with a heavy heart. Nothing but her own poverty on the one side, and the enormous fortune at stake on the other, could ever have decided her. For the fortune *was* enormous, and would render one of her daughters, at least, perhaps the greatest heiress in Italy. Under any other circumstances Anna would have enjoyed the drive in that huge,



antiquated coach, with its four fat horses, bewigged driver, and liveried servants.

Such scenery as they passed through was utterly new to her, and entirely different from that of her Southern home—undulating fields and rows of mulberry-trees, green hedges and shadowy lanes; white homesteads peeping forth from groups of enormous walnut-trees; a broad, level, well-kept high road, along which the carriage bowled without swerve or jolt.

At last they turned aside and began to wind amid the sinuosities of ever-rising hills.

"The Contessina is now upon the lands of her illustrious aunt," said Brigitta, in a solemn tone.

The old lady looked as if she expected the girl to reply by some indication of respectful awe. But she did nothing of the sort. She wiped her eyes and gazed sadly and indifferently out of the window.

Brigitta was sitting bolt upright opposite her. She would as soon have thought of eating meat on Friday as of occupying a seat together with one who had della Rocca blood in her veins. The good woman had been all her long life so saturated with the grandeur of the family, that she had almost come to regard them as something quite apart from the rest of mankind.

Up they wound among the hills—now between green banks overshadowed with hazel and elder; now across miniature prairies covered with short, juicy grass; here along a gentle stream, in whose clear, brown waters the pale stems of the beaches and the blue sky overhead mirrored themselves; there skirting a rock-bound torrent churning itself into foam amid the boulders; past fern-clad nook, smiling mead, shady glade, frowning forest; yet ever up, up, up, till at last, grim and grey, the towers of the castle showed amid the oaks and firs.

Anna's heart beat fast as the equipage drew up at the grand entrance. She sickened as she thought of the dear old home, so different and so far away! But there was no time for thought, for Brigitta stood waiting to help her out.

"And whatever you do, Contessina, do not forget the three reverences—the first just inside the door, the second——"

But the old woman's whispered instructions were cut suddenly short by Anna's pulling herself together with an effort, springing past, and bounding up the broad perron and across the lordly threshold with as little ceremony as if she had once more been at the farmhouse.

"Santa Maria!" exclaimed the astounded Abigail, as she gazed after the girl with open mouth and distended eyes. "What will the Marchioness——"

Anna disappeared within.

For a moment or two she could distinguish nothing. Then, little by little, as out of a mist, objects loomed forth. An enormous hall with a gigantic staircase to the right; figures in full armour against the

lofty walls ; above them trophies of arms and tattered banners ; a dozen or so of full-length portraits, black, indistinct, spectre-like. At the further end a dais surmounted by a canopy—the della Roccas were “*Marchesi del Baldacchino*”—that is, they had held and executed right of jurisdiction in times gone by—and furnished with a species of unwieldy arm-chair, huge and worn, once velvet and gilding, but now retaining few traces of its ancient splendour.

Beside this chair, and from which she had evidently risen, stood a little old lady with dark, lustrous eyes, puffs of snowy hair surmounted by an indescribable fabric of lace, and in a dress such as had long vanished from the modes of earth.

On her left stood an aged priest and two elderly gentlemen ; on her right, but quite in the background, a number of servants, male and female, the former in full livery, the latter all clad alike.

For a second Anna faltered, for her heart began to fail her. Then fortunately her eyes fell upon the famous genealogical tree with its emblazoned ramifications, and at the sight fresh courage awoke. Mother and sister, Alberto and Battista, started up before her ; and, with Tista's word “*geology*” sounding in her ears, she stepped forward. Almost before she knew where she was she found herself face to face with her eccentric relative. In a trice she had stepped upon the dais and kissed the old lady upon both cheeks. Then, half terrified at what she had done, she caught hold of the arm of the chair for support, and, with downcast eyes, awaited what was to come.

The silence was appalling, and was all unbroken save by a series of inarticulate sounds from the lips of the petrified grand-aunt. The sounds grew more distinct, then finally resolved themselves into the one word “*Ma-de-moi-selle !*”

One word only, it is true, but a single word, each syllable of which contained a volume. Amazement, dismay, anger, horror, were each and all clearly indicated.

“*Ma-de-moi-selle !*” was repeated in fainter tones ; and then the bewildered châtelaine sank back within the friendly arms of the seat behind her.

There was a murmur among the spectators, none of whom, however, ventured to interfere by either word or sign.

“*Dear aunt,*” said Anna, laying one of her thoroughbred but terribly sunburnt hands upon the old lady's shoulder, “*I am very sorry. I ought not to have been so abrupt, but I am very impulsive ; and as you, after mamma and Cordelia, are my nearest relative, pray forgive me ! You'll get used to me in time.*”

“*Get used to you !*” repeated the old lady in a faint troubled tone that sounded like an echo, and gazing up into her niece's face. “*Get used to you !*”

“*Yes, of course you will. One of you there, bring a glass of water. Do you feel faint, aunt ?*”

One of the servants hurried out to obey the order. He gave a

meaning glance as he passed his fellows. It meant, "the old one has got her match there."

A fresh murmur among the bystanders and a step towards the centre of attraction.

"She can't be a Rocca d'Oro—she must be a changeling," murmured the old marchioness, whose eyes had never been withdrawn from Anna's face. None but Anna heard the remark, so low was the tone in which it was uttered.

The reply to it, however, rang out clear enough for all to hear—the grim ancestors included. Possibly they trembled in their frames as they listened—those in the flesh around certainly felt a shiver of excitement as they caught the words :

"Of course I am a Rocca d'Oro, or half one, at least. By my father's side a Montalto. The Montaltos can trace back their ancestors to nearly fifty years beyond the della Roccas, and so——"

"Blasphemy—sheer blasphemy! what do you mean by it?" murmured the marchioness.

A groan from the bystanders.

"Oh, I thought you knew. I'm sorry. Please don't be vexed. It doesn't signify, you know. Ancestors are all very well in their way, but they don't count for much nowadays. The world is growing wiser."

"The world is going to destruction—that's what it is. I wish I were well out of it."

Something in the tone of the last words went straight to Anna's heart. With genuine feeling she knelt at her aunt's feet and, taking one of her withered but still beautiful hands in both her own, kissed it with real affection.

The Marchioness lay back in her chair with closed eyes. She made no attempt to withdraw her hand, only murmured: "She is a della Rocca, after all; but my heiress—no—no——"

Anna alone caught the words. They awakened a deep joy in her heart. A joy so great as to cause her to break out into a fit of hysterical weeping amid which, under her aunt's direction, she was led off to her rooms by Brigitta.

The little crowd opened obsequiously upon her passage. Anna had awakened a feeling of decided respect in all present. Perhaps not least of all in the Marchioness herself.

None but a genuine Rocca d'Oro could have ventured upon doing what Anna Montalto had just done. None witnessed the reaction.

#### IV.

ORSOLA DELLA ROCCA had begun to feel herself in a whirl of continual contradictions. Her niece's character and behaviour fairly bewildered her. The most audacious, and, to her, blasphemous,

outbreaks of ridicule at the expense of the defunct ancestors and the departed glory of their house alternated with the most affectionate and all-unused-to tenderness towards herself. It was something so new and unexpected that it puzzled, pained, and pleased the old lady in a most incomprehensible manner. She was not as yet aware of it, but the consciousness of not being so great and independent a personage as she had hitherto fancied herself had begun to dawn upon her. The icy crust that seclusion had built up around her heart was beginning, not to melt, but to crack; and through the crevices she caught glimpses of something better, higher and more worthy of living for, than worldly grandeur and earthly respect. Anna's sallies against all she had hitherto lived for, so to say, awakened a feeling of horror in the old lady's breast; but, at the same time, they also awakened no small amount of respect for the speaker. No living creature had ever dared speak in her presence in such a manner.

"It must all be the fault of her education," she would say; adding with a sigh: "What a pity! What a pity!"

For she never dreamed that these audacious sallies were prompted by cowardice—that Anna was like the soldier who threw himself into the breach because he saw no other way of escape.

And then, the Marchioness had, as many of us have, a fair share of the nettle in her. Touched with a shrinking hand, she stung; grasped with firmness, she remained harmless. Human nature cannot seclude itself from all save subordinate surroundings without paying the penalty of such an imprudence.

Anna instinctively felt that her aged relative needed affection; and, in consequence, her whole heart went out towards her. Anna was one of those who love all who stand in need of being loved. The whole castle took kindly to her—even the cats, who used to purr around her, their round heads rubbing against her dress, and their upright tails waving tremulously in the air. It was a trifle, but it wove a fresh link of the chain that was gradually binding aunt and niece to each other.

"I am sorry—very, very sorry!" the former would sigh. "She is kind and good, but, with her unhappy tendencies, she could never represent the family. I shall have to send for Cordelia. Ah, I am hardly tried! Not only a girl, but perhaps also a younger one. My poor nephew—if you had only lived!" It was terrible.

And then she felt her old arid heart daily thawing towards the girl with the sweet dark eyes and kindly smile. That was terrible, too, in its way. What was she to do? How would it all end? Meanwhile poor Anna was secretly pining amid all the solemn grandeur of her new life. She never complained, but she hated it, and her heart sickened when she thought of her dear ones in the old home by the open, sunlit sea. And she thought of them often enough!

The stately daily meals were a torment to her, with their endless dishes, their liveried servants, their choice wines, the enormous dining-

hall, and her aunt and herself, the chaplain and the secretary, seated at a table that would have accommodated a score, and left ample elbow-room into the bargain.

What a difference ! And how many hundred times pleasanter were the homely meals of simple minestra, polenta, roasted larks redolent of rosemary, fish, salad, and so on, served on delft, and enjoyed with an appetite born of exercise and content ! And the laughter and the chat, and Alberto, and old Erminia bustling from kitchen to dining-room, pressing everyone to eat, and joining in the conversation as if one of themselves, yet without losing one atom of respect or forgetting her place for a moment.

Dear old Erminia ! What a distance from her withered, smiling face to the marble features of the footmen who watched every morsel she put into her mouth, and who seemed always to be lying in wait to pounce upon the plate before her ! Her aunt was, after her fashion, very kind to her, and Anna's loving heart was filled with gratitude in consequence.

When she did break out in some sally or another against blue blood in general, and the ancestors in particular, it grieved her quite as much as it did the old lady ; but to do so was her only bulwark against adoption, and every day that passed convinced her more and more of her unfitness for playing the great lady, and confirmed her dislike to doing so.

Wonderful to relate, there were no ghosts at Rocca d'Oro, in spite of ancestors of every moral hue, and a mass of masonry in which any number of the same might have lurked.

Not a belted knight paced the long echoing galleries—not a veiled lady glided down the wide staircases. No millionaire's modern mansion could have been freer from phantoms than was the castle.

But, to make up for this defect, there was a haunted ruin within a stone's throw—a high tower crowning a rocky crest, surrounded by a belt of bushes and straggling oaks.

## V.

It was a rainy, wretched day. Woods and rocks glistened and streamed, and the sky was of a uniform leaden hue. Anna was sitting at one of the wide windows of her room. Sofia, the maid assigned to her exclusive service, was working at a table near. Without, nothing was heard but the pitiless pattering of the rain upon the boughs, and the awakening voice of the little stream yonsides the ridge upon which the tower rose. Within the castle itself absolute silence reigned.

"Why is that old ruin yonder called the 'Bella Alda's Tower,' Sofia ?"

"Signorina, do you not know ? I thought everybody——"

"No one ever told me, so how could I know? There—leave that skirt and come and sit by me in the window here."

Nothing loth, the girl obeyed. She had, like all the household, learned to love the simple, kindly-mannered young lady who had a gentle smile and a cordial word for all who approached her. They could scarcely credit her being a Rocca d'Oro, so different was her character from that which had become legendary in the country round.

"Well, you must know," began Sofia, "that hundreds of years ago—I forget how many—a certain Marchese Corrado was master here. And he was a demon, signorina—a very demon, and the terror of all he came across. For he spared neither high nor low, rich nor poor, and woe to any one who ventured to come between him and his desires."

"I understand. Go on."

"Down there, on the other side of the ridge, there lived in those days a forester and his family—I don't know his name, but it doesn't matter—good, honest people, and well-to-do also, for their daughter was brought up almost like a lady, and used to pass much of her time here at the castle together with the young ladies. Do I explain myself?"

"Yes—perfectly. And so——"

"So she grew up, and was known for many miles round as the most beautiful maiden in all the land. Even now they speak of her big blue eyes and wonderful golden hair."

"And, of course, the Marquis Corrado, the demon, fell in love with her?"

"Just so: the Marquis fell in love with her, and it was very wrong of him; for he couldn't marry her, you know—she was only a forester's daughter, and, besides that, he had a wife already."

"That was a difficulty, certainly."

"La Bella Alda"—for so everybody called her—was a good, honest girl, and would never listen to any of his declarations. She avoided him whenever she could. But the Marquis at last got furious, and one unlucky day he met the Bella Alda close to the foot of the tower yonder, and tried to seize her. There was no way of escape, so, in her terror, she flew up the steps of the tower—they must have been whole then, not like now, though one can still manage to scramble up to the platform at the top. Michele told me it was hard work for him, and he's a man. He went up to get me a pigeon's-nest."

"Who is Michele?"

Sofia blushed, looked down for a second, and then replied: "The sub-intendant's son and my future husband. As brave and fine a young man as ever walked!"

"My best wishes to you both! And La Bella Alda?"

"Yes. She reached the platform safe enough, but with the Marquis close behind her. He stretched out his hands to lay hold of her. 'If you touch me, I spring over,' she cried. But he only laughed. Then, with a 'Holy Virgin protect me!' over she sprang!"



"How dreadful !"

"Dreadful indeed ! That is, it might have been dreadful. It was wonderful instead. For the Holy Virgin heard her prayer and bore her up, so that she reached the ground as safe and sound as you or I."

"And the Marquis ?"

"The Marquis ? He had gone up with hair as black as a crow, when he came down it was white as my lady's. Soon after, his wife died—of a broken heart it was said. Then he entered a monastery."

"And La Bella Alda ?"

"She lived on for years. But she grew proud and pretentious : all Satan's doing, Father Ambrose says ; he was determined to have her soul one way or another : and went telling everybody that she was under the Blessed Virgin's especial protection, and people used sometimes to laugh at her. And one day, when she had been boasting as usual, they dared her to take the leap again. And she did it, and was taken up dead."

"Horrible !" cried Anna, with a shudder.

"Horrible, indeed ! but it was her just punishment, Father Ambrose says, for self-righteousness. Ever since then, La Bella Alda haunts the tower."

"Have you ever seen her ?" asked Anna. "I should like to do so."

"Ah, Signorina, God grant you never may, for she only appears to give warning of the death of a della Rocca !"

There was a knock at the door. Sofia went to see who it was, and returned with a letter which she handed to her young mistress.

"From Cordelia !" cried she ; then she opened it with eager, trembling fingers. Sofia returned to her sewing, while Anna remained at the window and read.

"MY DARLING SISTER,—

"How I wish I could curl myself up in an envelope like a caterpillar in a leaf, make Tista carry me to the post, and wake up with you at Rocca d'Oro ! How astounded our grand-aunt would be, and what a lecture upon family dignity I should receive ! But no, that would never do, and you shall see that my entry into what you call the old den, shall be of quite a different kind. For my entry there is decided upon. Her Ladyship has written to mamma about it. She likes you well enough, but says she could never entrust the family honours to one so incapable of appreciating them ! The words are hers. I am sure from your letters that she must be very much nicer than any of the pictures we used to draw of her. I feel remorseful at times. I shall enter Rocca d'Oro fully prepared to please her in all I can, and also to love her, if possible. But only in case you, dearest, continue to refuse the inheritance. If you try, you can surely undo the past, and then, I am sure, aunt will adopt you at once. I know I shall make a much better châtelaine than you, but I will never stand

in your way unless you insist upon it. Do as you please, Whatever may be mine later shall also be yours and dear mamma's. You both know that.

"When you come back, and you are to come back before I leave for Ivrea, you will find the dear old place rather shabby. The vines are in a terrible state, and we shall hardly get a barrel of wine out of the whole. The disease has never been so bad. Even Alberto's vines have suffered, in spite of all his care. He has been away for the last four days, at Genoa, on business I believe. He is pining terribly after you, darling, comes down after every post to hear if you have written—wanders about for hours, and seems quite lost. I wish you could have corresponded, but I suppose mamma was right in forbidding it. He knows nothing about your coming back.

"Tista is well, so is Erminia, but she is getting very deaf. I wish you could have seen their faces when they were told of your return! They love you much more than they do me, everybody, mamma also does that though. I neither wonder at it, nor am I jealous. I have sighed all my life to enter the great world. I am a better della Rocca than you, dear. Mamma is writing to the Signora Marchesa. What an odd world this is! Nobody seems ever to get what he wants! You almost lament over the number of dresses and things aunt has given you; most other girls, I among the number, would go wild with delight over them. Well, console yourself with the thought that they will come in nicely for the Signora Alberto.

"There, mamma has finished writing, and Tista is waiting to be off. So good-bye, and a thousand kisses from your loving sister,  
"CORDELIA."

On going to her room that evening, Anna read her letter once more through. They kept early hours at the castle, and not feeling sleepy, she took her favourite seat at the open window. Heavy clouds were billowing up from the horizon and betokened a coming storm. The rain had ceased, the heat was oppressive. From time to time the moon shone forth and flung sheets of silvery radiance upon the dripping woods, now lighting up the tall tower with ghostly gleam, now hiding as suddenly behind a mass of dark drifting vapour.

Anna gazed across at the ruin with newly awakened interest. Sofia's legend had taken her fancy. The rush of the stream, now swollen to a torrent, broke hoarsely upon the otherwise silent night.

Anna gazed forth and shuddered; she could not have told why, and had to cast a look round at her well-lit room and its comforts to reassure herself. The darkness was rapidly thickening without. It seemed to her as if a pall had been lowered upon the earth. Then came the growl of distant thunder. On it rolled, nearer and nearer, deeper and deeper, till once more it died away among the hills.

A sudden rift in the gloom overhead, and, for a second, the white light fell full upon the tower. Was she dreaming? There, upon its

summit stood a form with outstretched arms! She sprang to her feet and gazed out with straining eyes. But impenetrable gloom had once more wrapped its veil round all.

There she stood, watching with dilated eyes and beating heart. A blue flash, followed by a roar such as deafened all hearing, and, for a moment paralysed motion. Brief as was the glare however, it had revealed to Anna's eyes once more, a figure upon the summit of La Bella Alda's tower.

Covering her face with her hands, she sank back upon the chair.

At this moment the great bell at the castle gate rang forth in loud and clanging tones.

## VI.

THAT same day a young man in a light linen travelling suit had left one of the chief hotels at Ivrea, and, after having carefully inquired his way, directed his steps towards the castle of Rocca d'Oro. He was not a Piedmontese, but a "Meridionale," as his accent at once discovered. But, though the Piedmontese are apt to be somewhat mistrustful of strangers from Southern Italy, the frank features and cheery smile of the one in question, impressed all favourably, and no one hesitated to give him the required directions.

The sky was of a dull grey and the rain was falling, but nothing seemed to deter the traveller, or make him hesitate in his purpose. There was a smile of happy expectation on his handsome face, and a throb of intense longing in his loyal heart.

"If I can only see her for a moment," he murmured to himself, "even from far, I shall return content. I *could* not hold out longer!"

Then on he strode with renewed energy. His light garments were quickly drenched, but love and hope carried him on, and in due time he reached the top of a ridge and saw the castle before him. The tower of La Bella Alda was but a few paces distant; he hied thither for shelter.

Niching himself under a broad, low arch, he began to review his position. He was forced to confess to himself that he had come upon something very like a wild goose chase. But no repentance mingled with the feeling. Of course, Anna could not come out in such weather. The rain had literally drowned all hope of that—but he might see her at some window—and, for a lover ardent as himself, that was already much.

So there he sat, gazing with longing, loving eyes at the grim pile before him that held all he most loved upon earth, and muttering fragmentary curses upon the pitiless Piedmontese sky overhead. Oh, for a little of the sunshine from his own sunny South!

He tried to light a cigar, but naturally failed. The matches were wet, and the next moment the box went flying into the elder-bush beside him.

The hours glided by. Slowly, perhaps, but not sadly. Alberto had, now and again, seen figures at one or another of the windows, but no glimpse of Anna had blessed his watchful eyes.

Drowsiness began to creep over him. He caught himself nodding; started, gazed more intently than before for a moment, then nodded again. The picture before him grew hazy and dim—a species of blurr; then vacancy. Another half start, his head sank forward, and he slept.

But strange, bewildering dreams surged up to rob him of rest—broken images in a never-ending maze. One in particular.

There, at the mouth of the arch, stood Anna, radiant with smiles, and holding out her hands towards him. He tried to grasp them—they eluded his touch. Once, twice, thrice; then at last, after a violent effort, he succeeded. But it was no longer Anna who stood before him. It was a maiden with sad blue eyes full of mystic meaning, and with an aureole of golden hair around her head. He let fall the hands he had seized, for they had suddenly grown chill as ice, and their cold pressure thrilled him to the core. She spoke—for he saw her lips move—but no words reached his ear, strain as he would. Then she glided from his side to the foot of the shattered stairs, and pointed upwards. She seemed to be relating something, but he could not catch her meaning. Her face took an expression of despair—she raised one hand as if to bid him listen, while, with the other, she pointed to the glen behind. A cry for help seemed to float up from the rocks and brushwood below. He turned, and, when he again sought the maiden's face, he saw her with swift and certain foot mounting the winding stairs, her golden hair and white-robe gleaming with a light all their own. He was about to follow her when a second cry reached him.

He started violently, and awoke. So like reality had this last part of his vision been, that he caught himself listening for a repetition of the cry, and looking upwards to catch a glimpse of the golden-haired maiden. But neither repaid his trouble, and, with a little laugh at his own credulity, he sat down once more.

But his limbs were cramped, and he felt chilled. Want of food and wet were making themselves felt.

He thought that a little motion would do him good, and so began to climb the crazy old stairs. He reached the top with little difficulty and less danger. The lower steps were somewhat broken, but the higher he got, the better he found them.

Just below the platform was a sort of little chamber—dry and snug—a perfect palace compared with the niche below in which he had been cooped. And, best of all, a narrow window gave him a full view of the castle opposite.

He mounted to the platform to take a survey, keeping carefully behind the battlements. Then he went back to the chamber below to resume his watch. Prudence whispered him to return there and

then to Ivrea, rest, and a hot meal—love urged him to remain where he was, and shiver. And love conquered.

Perseverance at last had its reward. Darkness had fallen, and, at one of the illuminated windows, he recognized Anna.

He sprang upon the platform, and eagerly waved his arms towards her.

Then the storm broke. And yet, all unheeding, Alberto kept to his post. Cold, hunger, fatigue, all were forgotten in his exultation as he stood and gazed.

A momentary lull in the tempest, and, during the brief pause, the cry that Alberto had heard in his dreams floated up once more. No fancy this time, however, but the wail of one in agony and peril.

For a moment Alberto listened and hesitated, then, with a final wave to his beloved, he commenced a descent. Now blinded by the lightning, now aided by its glare, he made his way down; clinging here, groping there, till at last he reached the ground in safety.

As he stepped into the gloom the cry was repeated. Rapidly as he was able he scrambled down the slope. Wet bows flapped in his face, clothes and hands were torn and scratched. Yet on he went, till, thanks to energy, and aided by a gleam or two of faint moonlight, he reached the spot whence the cry had come. A man lay upon the ground. Alberto knelt beside him.

"At last, thank God!"

"Where are you hurt?"

"My leg, it is broken."

"Have you been here long?"

"Hours."

"Do you think you can manage to rise?"

No reply; the injured man had fainted. For a moment Alberto hesitated, but for a moment only. With one more look at the prostrate man, he turned and bounded up the slope. The moon had burst forth white and clear, and he could make his way without difficulty. From the summit he saw the castle rising grim and grey before him, and with fleet foot he crossed the narrow valley and made for the front entrance. There he rang such a peal at the great gate as flung the inhabitants into no slight commotion.

## VII.

Who could ring like that, and at such an hour, in so authoritative a manner?

"It must be a Royal messenger," said the Marchioness to Brigitta, who was aiding her mistress to make a hasty toilette. "His Majesty is at Turin. No, not that shawl, the other. Or a despatch from the Ministry concerning my poor murdered nephew. There, let us go now."

The whole household almost had assembled in the great hall, and varied was the exhibition of toilettes in every stage of progression. On the Marchioness's entrance one and all drew aside, so that she found herself in an open space and face to face with a young man whose eyes were flashing with excitement, and whose dress was in the most deplorable disorder. Mud-stained, moss-marked, torn in places and bedraggled in a manner impossible to describe. A more perfect contrast to a self-sufficient Royal messenger or ministerial emissary could scarcely be conceived.

The old lady almost started, while a frown gathered above her dark bright eyes. Alberto's face bore no trace of suffering, had it done so, the frown would not have appeared; she saw nothing but a stalwart and apparently healthy young man, who had invaded her home in disreputable garments, and at a most impertinent hour. That was quite enough. But more was to come, and that, too, before any word of explanation could be either asked or given.

A faint cry broke from the group near the foot of the staircase, and then Anna rushed forwards, seizing the intruder by the arm and, in a tone that touched all present, cried, "Mamma—Cordelia, are they——"

"As well as possible," Alberto hastened to say. "It was nothing about them that brought me here."

"Thank God!" ejaculated Anna.

"And may I ask what *did* bring you here, sir, and who you are?" demanded the Marchioness, with an ominous ring in her voice and a yet more expressive drawing up of her slight figure.

In a few hurried but sufficiently clear words, Alberto explained the situation. Fortunately for him, the old lady never remembered to ask what had brought him lurking about her residence at such an undue hour; had she done so, poor Alberto would have been terribly put to for a reply. Her frown relaxed at once, and, almost before Alberto's last word was uttered, she was giving orders with a promptitude and forethought that spoke well for head and heart.

Like many others in this misty world of ours, Orsola della Rocca was much more sinned against than sinning. She had obstinately persisted in donning a mantle pieced together with the armorial rags and remnants of her ancestors and the past, and the world had neither time nor inclination to lift the folds and discover the good that lay hidden beneath.

It was nearly an hour before the men, who had at once been despatched with a stretcher from the castle, returned and deposited the injured man upon the bed prepared for him. After careful examination, the doctor declared there to be no immediate danger, though the fracture of the ankle was serious, and the patient in a very weak state. He had plainly undergone recent and severe hardship, for he was terribly emaciated, and pale in spite of sunburn. Everything was done for his relief and comfort, and the doctor and one



of the head servants were to pass the night at his bedside. Bidding the former send her a report early next morning, the Marchioness carried Anna off to her own apartments.

The latter passed an uncomfortable quarter of an hour there, poor girl, for her aunt questioned her closely, with her bright old eyes relentlessly fixed upon her face, and had no great difficulty in obtaining a tolerably clear insight into the true state of affairs. She made no remark, however. Only when Anna, upon her dismissal, made a movement to kiss her grand-aunt's hand as usual, the hand was quietly, but decidedly, withdrawn, and the customary "*Dormez bien, petite,*" surrogated by an icy "*Bonne nuit, Mademoiselle.*" Nor could appealing eyes obtain anything more.

### VIII.

NONE could guess what the morrow was about to bring forth.

The sun rose in cloudless glory, the rain-drops glittered like diamonds on blade and bow, the bees hummed amidst the flowers, the birds sang from the thickets, the hoarse roar of the rivulet had once more sunk to a tuneful tinkle. Without the castle all was peace and repose, within it all was conjecture and excitement.

The adventure of the past night was an event in the lives of the dwellers therein. To one or two it was about to prove of life importance.

The patient lay upon his bed. He was better—infinately better—for after the skilful setting his leg had become far less painful, Alberto sat at his side, for he insisted upon having him there. Rightly enough he regarded Alberto as the saviour of his life. Had he not found and rescued him, he must certainly have died of exhaustion and exposure. He felt grateful in consequence.

There was a knock at the door. The doctor went to see who it was.

"Please, sir, her Ladyship has sent to ask if she can pay a visit to her sick guest, and at what o'clock."

"Whenever her Ladyship pleases. There is no danger, but I will ask the patient himself."

He did so, and, while willingly assenting, a strange smile wandered over his drawn features. He complained of the light hurting his eyes, and begged them to draw the curtains partially. His desire was at once complied with, and the large lofty room was wrapped in a semi-gloom that contrasted strongly with the golden sunshine without.

Alberto rose to go.

"No, no, don't stir. Please remain just where you are."

"But the Marchioness——"

"Never mind the Marchioness. She will be quite content to have you there. I give you my word for it."

Alberto looked wonderingly at the patient; then resumed his seat.

Not over willingly, it must be confessed. He had a wholesome dread of Orsola della Rocca, and, perhaps, not wholly without cause.

A few minutes later the door was opened to its widest width, and the old lady entered. The patient drew the sheet quite up to his chin.

With slow, stately, but noiseless step she approached the bed; stopped within a yard or so, and then, with a stately bend of the head but also with a courteous smile said:

"You are welcome to my house, sir. I only regret that an unhappy accident was the cause that brought you here."

The stranger thanked her. But, in a voice that had suddenly grown husky.

While he was doing so, his hostess settled herself in the armchair that Brigitta had wheeled near the bed. Alberto, who had risen and who was standing there somewhat sheepishly, was struck at seeing something very like a tear gather in the patient's eyes. "Poor fellow," he thought, "he must be weak as a girl. But then it was a deuce of an accident to be sure."

There was a momentary silence. The heavy curtains waved softly to and fro in the warm summer air, causing uncertain lights and shadows to play upon all within.

I am happy to learn from the doctor that you are doing well. My house and all it contains are at your disposal. It was a fortunate thing that they found you!"

"Yes, indeed. Had it not been for this fine fellow here," with a motion of his head towards Alberto, who blushed like a girl, "I should now be——"

"Don't think of it," interrupted the old lady; "think, rather, of getting strong once more. It was a bad fracture, the doctor says."

"Yes. I stumbled into a hole covered with moss. I had taken the short cut across from the town, and——"

He stopped. The Marchioness looked at him curiously. She was too high-bred to ask what had induced him to take a short cut that led nowhere but to her house. Yet she would very much have liked to know.

"I was on my way to friends," he added.

"Ah, you have friends in the neighbourhood?"

"Yes, madam. One, at least. One whom I have not seen for long, long years. Almost the only relation I have in the world."

The Marchioness continued to gaze at him. Something in his tone seemed to strike her. There were tears in it, as the French say.

"Would you like your relative to be informed? To be sent for?"

"There is no need, thank you. She will know all in good time."

"She? Your mother, perhaps?"

"No, Signora, my aunt."

Rapidly the old lady passed in mental review all the families around. None suited the circumstances. Yet her unknown guest

was evidently a gentleman. Language and voice showed the highest breeding; ears and hands the bluest blood.

She was unpleasantly puzzled. "He must have some reason for not giving his name. Well, the incognito shall be respected," thought the old lady.

"How glad your aunt will be when she hears of your escape!"

"And how grateful to my preserver here." He took Alberto's hand as he spoke.

"Of course. Yes; she ought to be grateful indeed!"

She sighed; for the thought of how boundlessly grateful she would have shown herself to anyone that could have saved her poor nephew from his cruel death. She had scarcely ever seen him since his boyhood, his mania for travelling and exploration having occupied his whole life. But his loss had, nevertheless, been a sad trial to her.

"Yes, indeed; she ought to be grateful," he repeated. "Not exactly on my own personal account," he laughed, "for I have been a careless, undutiful dog of a nephew, but because I am the last of my race, and——"

A sudden trembling seized upon the old lady. She looked piteously into the stranger's face.

"The last of your race, Signore? The last of your race? Oh, then, I—all of us—must be doubly careful of you, for your own sake—for you aunt's—for the name you bear——"

She paused. Then continued in a lower tone, as if to herself, but with an accent that went straight to the hearts of her hearers—

"Ah, I, too, had a nephew—the last of my race and name; he was hardly ever out of my thoughts, for in him were centred all my hopes. Lands, honours, all were to have been his; and I was ever picturing to myself this old place gladdened by the prattle of his children, who would carry on the unbroken line of our ancestors. But it was not to be—it was not to be; and now——"

Her voice failed her.

"And now?" repeated the stranger, in a low, husky tone, taking the old lady's passive hand in both his own: "and now?"

A shriek from old Brigitta made everyone start. There she stood, clinging convulsively to the back of her mistress's chair, and staring wildly at the stranger.

A stronger breath of the summer breeze had swelled the swaying curtains wider apart, and caused the mellow, golden sunshine to flood the hitherto darkened room.

"It is—it is—oh, my mistress, my darling mistress—it is your nephew himself—your nephew himself!"

Orsola della Rocca sprang to her feet, pale as a sheet and with hands clasped in an agony of doubt and supplication.

"Speak—for mercy's sake, speak! Who are you?"

"Aunt—my poor dear aunt, I am your truant nephew, Guido della Rocca."

She fell on her knees beside the bed. "God be praised—oh, God be praised!" she cried. Her head sank upon her nephew's arm, and her whole frame was shaken by convulsive sobs.

"Aunt, my dear aunt!"

There was not a dry eye in the room. Alberto fairly wept. He was learning at his own expense that one does not always need a "deuce of an accident" to make one "weak as a girl."

Comparative composure being restored, all was simply and briefly cleared up. After undergoing a long and terrible captivity to one of the hostile tribes in Central Africa, Guido della Rocca had at last found means of escape, but only long after a false report of his massacre had been spread. After incredible hardship he had reached the coast and procured a passage for Genoa. He had come on thence without delay; had got out at a small station, intending to take a short cut to the castle; had fallen, and been found by Alberto—all as simple as extraordinary things generally turn out in the end. Brigitta had recognised him from having seen him once or twice at his mother's house during her last long illness and whither she had been sent by the Marchioness. A romance woven of the most commonplace, everyday facts. Orsola della Rocca sat holding one of her nephew's hands in hers, almost as if she feared she might lose him once more.

A sudden remembrance strikes her. She rises, makes the tour of the huge bed to where Alberto is standing, takes his strong, brown hands in her slim, delicate ones, and says: "It is thanks to you, under God's will, that I am to-day the happiest woman in all Italy. Ask what you will in return—ask without fear—it shall not be refused you."

To this day Alberto Feliciani cannot tell how he ever managed to do and say it. He declares that the words passed his lips without any effort of his own. It is easy to guess what he *did* ask, but impossible to describe the tone in which his "Grant me the hand of your grand-niece, O gracious lady!" was uttered, or picture the surprise of all present on seeing the handsome young giant kneeling at the feet of the frail, high-born old Marchioness.

She grew deadly pale, then flushed crimson. The struggle was violent but short.

"Marchese Guido della Rocca"—turning to her nephew—"from the moment you entered this house you became the head of the family. It is for you to decide."

"You gave your word, aunt, and a della Rocca cannot retract. But, all things considered, I think it is best to let Anna herself decide."

With a cry of joy Alberto sprang to his feet. He knew that at last the victory was his.

## IX.

A LOVELY September night ; the full moon smiling softly down upon shimmering sea and olive-clad height ; the air full of balmy odour ; flowers sleeping with gently drooping heads ; leaves folded in slumber like hands in prayer ; the idle swish of waters upon the beach ; the occasional flutter of a bird among the ilex and magnolia. Such the scene as they all sat there upon the terrace in front of Countess Altamonte's modest home.

Orsola della Rocca lying back in a low garden-chair ; Brigitta on a stool at her feet ; the Countess at her aunt's side ; Anna and Cordelia, Alberto and Guido, grouped a few paces off ; Battista and Erminia in the background, seated upon the doorstep of the dwelling.

"And you really think your stay here has done you good, dear aunt?"

"It has indeed. And I feel so happy, too! I cannot tell you how happy! This last event has crowned all my wishes."

She looked over towards her nephew and Cordelia, who had wandered on as far as the balustrade, and were standing there, close together, apparently gazing down at the sea.

"I should like them to marry as soon as possible. Could not both our dear girls be married on the same day?"

"Of course they can, aunt, if you wish it, and if——"

"I *do* wish it with all my heart. I have got all business matters done, so that there is no hindrance."

"Dear aunt, I don't know how to thank you for your liberality to my daughters and myself. Thanks to you, we——"

"Thank me then by never speaking about it. I don't know how I could have been so unmindful of you all these long years. Worse than unmindful—it was cruel ; cruel in the extreme."

"My dear aunt, don't distress yourself——"

"Can you forgive me?"

Countess Altamonte took her aunt's hand in hers, and pressed it tenderly in reply.

The Marchioness lay back with closed eyes, murmuring softly to herself, "Cruel—cruel, indeed!"

The white moonlight fell full upon her, softly illuminating her calm well-cut features, and her frail, clasped fingers with their glittering rings.

"Yes, dear," she continued after a pause, "my whole life has been a foolish mistake—I see it all now. But, God be thanked, the awakening has come. Late, very late, but still it has come. I have never known until now what real happiness meant. Pray God to prolong my days, that I may yet further atone for the past."

A prayer that seems as if it would be granted ; for Aunt Orsola grows younger every day ; and whenever they all meet, which is often, a happier gathering does not exist in the whole of sunny Italy.

A. BERESFORD.

## BY CHANCE.

THE day was fast declining, and a cool breeze from the hills was sweeping over the drowsy little Devonshire village, as the two equestrians, who were filling up an idle summer in scouring the wildest and most romantic parts of the West Country, slackened rein, and looked about for a possible night's lodging. They were men of some thirty years or so, with all the world-worn marks that show themselves, or are assumed, so conspicuously at that age.

Graduated together at Balliol, Oxford, they had both dropped into easy fortunes, and settled in the same chambers in London to run their luck in the literary world.

Society had been electrified from time to time by daring articles in the periodicals of unconventional odour, and brilliant spirited witticisms; whilst the philosophic world had welcomed the subtle reasoning and amazing power of language that fell from another unknown pen. And the two men were as unlike in character and physique as they were in mind and taste. Jack Derwent was strongly and gracefully built, and endowed with all the fascinations of the correctly handsome face.

But Jack knew, with all his sparkling *bonhomie* and good looks, he had never learnt the secret magnetism that drew the women of deeper soul to prefer the society and eccentric visage of his friend. Cope's face denoted all the mental strength and force of the man; by far too expressive, too shadowed and lined with thought, to give one any distinct idea of what the mere features were, but a face unmistakably indicative of keen intellectual power and great-hearted sympathies. A face that one trusted instinctively or shrank from in nervous fascination. What his personal magnetism was, no one had ever defined, but all recognised its living influence. In every circle of society he was always the central attraction, and yet his almost aggravating modesty and lack of self-esteem had thwarted, and were likely to thwart, all his friend's ambitious ideas for him.

In spite of a delicate constitution, he could rise to all his companion's enjoyment of life, and had expressed his delight in the rich beauty of the country through which they were riding by many a poetic outburst, which the effete Jack had attempted to crush.

"Don't you think," cried the latter, "that looks a possible place?" pointing to a farm at the end of the deep, red lane.

"Yes," Earle replied; "I already embrace the cider."

"And the pretty farmer's daughter!" and Jack pointed with his whip through the trees to their right, to a small figure dressed in rough serge and a coloured kerchief, driving home the cattle.

"No, I am weary of women, and agree with the sage old Father of



the church, who denounced them as, 'a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a deadly fascination, and a painted ill.'

Jack laughed. "Not much paint about a farmer's daughter. Hallo! my lass, can you tell us if we can get a night's lodging anywhere about here?"

They had overtaken the girl and the cattle, but Jack's familiarity met with no response; she walked slowly on without apparently the least idea she had been addressed, and there was something strangely dignified in the girl's walk, and the imperious pose of her head beneath the kerchief. The men glanced at each other, and Earle sprang to the ground and reached her side.

"Would you oblige us"—he began, and she turned and faced him. For a moment he was taken aback by the beauty of the woman, and the innate refinement of her whole mien.

"Yes?" she asked, scanning his face with a fearless smile. "What is it you want?"

"A night's lodging," he answered. "Perhaps you would kindly direct us."

"We can take you in at the farm if you will ride on. That is the entrance."

She returned his bow with proud indifference and fell back.

"By Jove!" Jack exclaimed. "What magnificent eyes! and what a voice!"

"Yes," said Earle; "I have forgotten my thirst."

They found a ready accommodation, and the hearty farmer delighted to welcome them.

"I'm glad for my daughter," he said, rubbing his hands and eyeing the horses as a lad unstrapped the knapsacks from the saddles and led them away. "I'm always glad for my daughter when a scholar turns up. She's like her mother, and the old lady before her, fond of a bit of learning. Where will ye like to sup? It's cool in the porch here."

Later on he came and suggested a walk round the place before it was too dark, for there were various points of traditional interest connected with it. Jack readily accepted, but Earle pleaded fatigue, and preferred to smoke in the porch.

"Bertha," the farmer called to his daughter, "bring the gentleman that paper Squire Godwin left last week."

"My father has no idea news a week old is slightly uninteresting," she said, as she brought it with a smile. "This is the *Saturday Review*, and a very poor number."

"You are a reader yourself?" Earle could not resist asking.

"I read everything that comes in my way," she answered. "But I am interrupting your smoke."

She passed down the path, and he quickly followed and opened the gate. A red glow of sunlight flashed upon her as she smiled

to thank him, and he wondered if he had ever seen so beautiful a woman.

Jack came back limping, supporting himself on the farmer's arm.

"Sprained my ankle, confound it!" he explained, and the farmer entered on a long tirade against the learning that took away all a man's common-sense; and Earle never quite grasped how it had happened. Bertha came quickly to the fore, and showed a remarkable skill in binding.

"It is not very severe," she said; "but you will have to keep your foot up, and must prolong your stay for a few days, which I hope will not be a great inconvenience to you?"

"It is a happy necessity," he answered quickly.

"The couch in my sitting-room is the most comfortable, father," she said, "and these gentlemen shall with pleasure occupy the room."

They both protested, and only gave in when she promised that it should not banish her or her father. Earle approached it with curiosity. There is always so much that is characteristic in the arrangement of a room, and how would this woman with her stately mien and white hands have described her tastes? He certainly did not expect quite the charm of the artistic touches he found. It was all so simple, but so perfect in harmony of colouring, so graceful in its poverty. The little oak bookcase held her few treasures; the walls were bare except for one or two water-colour sketches and a portrait in oils. Of herself?

Jack's eyes asked the question as he glanced from it to her own face, and saw the strong likeness.

"No," she smiled, "every one makes that mistake. It was an ancestor of mine on my mother's side, who died very tragically—curiously enough in this very house."

"May we know the tragedy?"

Jack sank back on the couch and she raised the pillows for him.

"Oh, it is very little I can tell you; you shall see the room before you go, if you like," she said dropping her voice. "My father cannot bear the subject mentioned; and has fallen into the old superstition of allowing nothing to be touched."

"Is it the room above that queer wooden staircase at the north end?" Jack asked.

"Yes; you noticed it? The farm in those days was the old Manor House, and this girl, the daughter of the house, had the misfortune to be beautiful without realising the misfortune. One Christmas Eve a ball was given in the neighbourhood, and there she met her fate. It is supposed her lover, mad with love and jealousy, followed her home and surprised her in her room as she was undressing. She was found in the morning stabbed, her ball-dress flung on the bed, and the man's sword lying on the floor in a pool of blood. The dress and sword have never been removed, they are lying there still."

"But the man?"

"No one ever traced him, or, as far as I can make out, attempted to do so!"

"It would have been easy enough," Jack cried excitedly; "the man's sword would most likely have betrayed him—it probably bears his crest."

"Which rust has slightly obliterated. But you shall see it."

It was a promise he was eager should be fulfilled, but the opportunity was slow in coming, as it was necessary the farmer should be out of the way. But the time passed pleasantly enough for the two men, who delighted in the companionship of this intellectual, self-cultured woman.

"I wonder," Jack said once, when he had watched her pass the window in her dark green habit—"I wonder if she would be as beautiful under other circumstances?"

Earle looked up from his book with a quick, scrutinising glance.

"I doubt if she would be as happy."

"That is begging the question; but what do you mean?"

"Throw such a woman into a greater intensity of life, where all her powers would be called into play, and she would suffer acutely."

"But beautifully! One would be careful to surround her with all the refinements of beauty that would appeal to her sensibilities. Here her spirit must be for ever unsatisfied."

"I think not. Goethe says 'no circumstance is unpoetic to the poet,' and I think she fulfils that. But to go back to your first question. Such a woman must always be beautiful, anywhere, everywhere, and she must create beauty wherever she breathes."

"My dear fellow, your enthusiasm will be the ruin of you! And I am not sure you are right. She is the genius of this place, because all surrounding beauty falls short of her, and because she strikes the one harmonic note. But picture her in a higher idealic atmosphere, take her from her isolation——"

"You can't! She must for ever be isolated—the one distinctive, not harmonic, note—the one ideal that has fulfilled itself."

He walked to the window, and pushed aside the curtain to gain a wider view. "This place is a dream of beauty. But why should we stay any longer? Your foot's all right."

"What a restive animal man is! I don't intend to go till I have seen the mystic chamber."

"My dear boy! A few rags and cobwebs. Besides, Miss Lane told me this morning there would be a brilliant opportunity whilst her father was at market this evening."

They made the investigation, and Jack was intrusted with the sword to make any discoveries he could. He took it to his own room, and Earle followed his hostess back to the house. But both paused in the porch, and turned to watch the late sun reddening the deep-shadowed lane at their feet.

"Mr. Derwent declares sunsets are out of date—vulgarised! How

amusing he is with his effete indifference!" she said, glancing with her beautiful smile into Earle's face.

"It is a borrowed cynicism that he certainly amusingly assumes," Earle laughed. "But London is sated with these ideas; and all life becomes shallow and unreal when they are indulged."

"Are you not a little cynical yourself?"

"What makes you say that?" he asked quickly.

"I am never altogether sure whether you are laughing at me or not," she said, a little nervously.

"Laughing at *you*! I should be denying the grandest hope of my life."

"What have I to do with that?" The smile of an undefined surprise parted her lips, and her eyes darkened.

Earle caught her hands, and held them fiercely in his own.

"I mean you have taught me—you are teaching me—that there is an immeasurable, inexhaustible attainment, beyond the buried facts of life; or else one's soul has been awaked in vain, and the glimpse of heaven the cruellest of all illusions."

She took her hands gently away, and turned from him.

"You are in a strange, impressionable mood. I don't quite understand you. But it is only a passing emotion, and when you have returned to your own surroundings, you will forget this moment."

"Bertha!"

"Hush!—not you—not you!" and she covered her face with her hands. Then with an effort, she came close to him, and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"You have stayed too long—stayed until the great pulses of life are drugged with false illusions. Go back! Go back to reality, and leave the thought of me here. I—oh! I am no friend—no possible worth to such as you!"

Again he took possession of her hands, and his lips were very white.

"You have no trust in me? No—why should you? Men have told you—I know there was never a man who crossed your threshold but has told you—you are beautiful, and he loves you. I tell you neither; such expressions are commonplace, insulting. I only tell you, by some wonderful fatality, my soul has been drawn into touch with a greater soul; and the only response of my being lies in you. I only tell you the life of glory, for a few blissful weeks, has been revealed to me—revealed in your eyes, your smile—and when its memory dies, I shall be worse than dead."

He bent over her, his breath fanned her brow, and she heard the beating of his heart.

For one instant she trembled, and a great sob rose in her bosom; and then she said:

"No man has so honoured me. But I will ~~not~~, I dare not listen to you. The world lies at your feet; you are born for greatness. And it shall not be lost, sacrificed for a passing fancy for a farmer's daughter!"

She bowed her proud, lovely head beneath his gaze, and walked past him into the house.

The sword was still undergoing its scouring and polishing when Earle came in an hour later, and Jack was far too eager to notice any change on his friend's face, but he was a little irritated with Earle's renewed persistence on leaving the following day.

"I was just making up my mind to stay here all the autumn," he said.

"What, and give up Switzerland and Lady Grace?"

Jack reddened. "Ah! there is beauty personified," he sighed; "or conventionalised?"

"You are a Philistine, Earle! there is not the smallest hope for you. Hallo! by George!"

"Eureka?"

"Yes, but look at that! *Aut vincere aut mori*."

Earle stared and took the sword from Derwent's hand.

"It is what you supposed," he said after a careful examination.

"It is my own crest, and I am the descendant of a murderer; a murderer of——" He stopped, and the sword dropped to the ground. Bertha was in the room.

"I have come for it," she cried; "it must be returned. I—I heard what you said—*your* crest!"

Earle picked it up and gave it to her, laughing bitterly.

"A beautiful inheritance to have dropped upon, is it not? A complete and irreversible answer to all my pleading," he added below his breath, and his eyes burnt her with their fierce light.

"I cannot see what you have proved," Jack cried; the whole truth of the scene flashing startlingly upon him.

"*Everything!* There are initials—my own, too, by another strange coincidence—E. C."

"But what has a jealous mania to do with you?"

"I bear the stain on my name. An hour ago, this lady did me the honour to listen to my addresses. I make her now the sincerest apology, and I will not intrude another night under her roof. May I order my horse, madam?"

The graceful courtesy of this man touched her deeply. She put the sword from her as if it had pierced her, and looked in his face with her eyes full of tears.

"If you put yourself to this inconvenience, you will pain me greatly. Please stay as long as you intended, and grant me a few words before you leave. I am a little overwrought, I will not see you again to-night."

She held out her hand to Jack, and he saw the tears were streaming down her cheeks.

"Thank you," was all Earle said, and he did not see her face.

The dews were heavy on the green fields the next morning when he waited to bid her good-bye. Jack had agreed to follow him later in

the day. And he was standing now, one hand on his bridle, looking up the lane for the flutter of the white gown, and the breeze stirring the dark hair of the proud bare head that he should never see again.

She came at last, pale in her beauty and majestic in her pain.

"You were kind to grant me this," she said, and she took the red rose, all wet with dew, from her breast, and held it up to him.

"Wear it to-day," she said, "for my sake, and know that I shall ever think of you apart from all other men ; that I cannot connect you with any incident of the past, and that if you would leave me without one bitter thought, you will wipe this story from your memory now and for ever."

"Bertha, you are noble and generous ! I dare not accept your words, but one question I will, I must ask you. Has my coming here brought you any pain ?"

"It is a pain that is beautiful," she answered, unconsciously rendering Jack Derwent's ideal for her. "No one could come into contact with you and feel quite the same again, and I—I——"

"What ?" he whispered ; but he had read the passion of love in her eyes, and he had folded her closely to his breast.

"Bertha, is it true ? I would have waited for you for ever ; but I will not go away to-day, my love ; nor ever, without you."

LILIAN STREET.

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### DISILLUSION.

WIDE was the world in days gone by,  
High towered its summits to the sky ;  
And far away went sea and shore  
Winding and gleaming evermore :  
Now rounded by a span might be  
The low and little sphere I see.

Fair was the world in days of old,  
Through silver mist and haze of gold  
I saw the gloom, I saw the glow,  
Which morn and only morn can show :  
On flowerless field and leafless way,  
Nor cloud nor colour steals to-day.

My feet went lightly to the strain  
Of happy birds, whose glad refrain  
Was : "Onward, onward, perfect bliss  
Awaits to crown thee with her kiss."  
Now softer fall their accents clear :  
"She comes, she comes ; but never here !"



